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KOREA AND U.S. SECURITY STRATEGY:
A TIME FOR CHANGE

by

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Preface

The issue of American involvement in Korea is a subject that is laden with emotional overtones and contradictions for Koreans. On the one hand the U.S. has been viewed as the underlying cause for the ongoing division on the peninsula. On the other hand, the strong U.S. alliance with the Republic of Korea has been viewed as the basis for preventing a resumption of the bloody civil war that left the country divided in 1953. The zero sum mentality between the two sides has served to exacerbate any attempt to find a peaceful resolution while unification of the peninsula has taken on almost mystical qualities for many Koreans. Viscerally they believe unification is desirable, but practically neither side is willing to compromise any perceived advantage prior to its actual occurrence. Accordingly, there is a great deal of anxiety that accompanies any discussion concerning adjustments to the U.S.-ROK security relationship prior to reunification. The reluctance to make changes in the relationship has created a situation where the status quo is comfortable because it creates an illusion of stability.

My personal quest for reaching an understanding of dynamics of the relationships stem from involvement first as a political and economic analyst for the Combined Forces Command staff in Seoul followed by a tour as a political-military affairs officer with the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission Secretariat. As with many other analysts who have examined the Korea issue, this personal involvement

undoubtedly has had a large influence on my perspective concerning the nature of the relationships within the U.S.-ROK alliance and those with the North.

The diverse influences that combined to color my perspective on the issues presented in this paper are too numerous to mention. Friends, colleagues, and interlocutors from both sides of the DMZ have all added to my modest understanding of the issues. I am also grateful to Professor Pendley for his comments on the preliminary draft and his constructive assistance.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the US security strategy in Northeast Asia in the post-Korean Armistice period. Although the United States has maintained a steadfast alliance with the Republic of Korea since the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, the decision by the United States to actively engage North Korea in direct dialogue has created the potential for increasing divergence of interest within the alliance. The United States is concerned with the nuclear proliferation issue while the Republic of Korea is concerned with being recognized as a principal party to any peace settlement. The American military's interest in maintaining the Armistice and the evolution of the Korean peace process constrain the policy options for US involvement. Despite several initiatives, there remain fundamental differences between North and South Korea that prevent an effective peace regime on the peninsula. What role should the US play in the peace process? What are the US security interests in Northeast Asia that need to be maintained in a post-Armistice period? How does US involvement in implementing the Agreed Framework with North Korea and the Four Party Peace Talks impact the viability of the U.S.-ROK security alliance? The paper will attempt to develop a strategy for ensuring American interests are maintained through the transition to peace and recommend ways to enhance the role of the security alliance in the context of preserving American regional interests in the post-Armistice era.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Korea is frequently referred to as the last vestige of the Cold War. The basis for this characterization stems from the fact that the confrontation between North and South Korea has persisted despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of communist governments around the world. Throughout the Cold War, the American commitment to the defense of South Korea served as a primary example of the American commitment to contain communism. Today, American security relationships in Korea remain bounded by the 1953 Military Armistice Agreement and the 1953 U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) Mutual Security Agreement, both of which are firmly grounded in the American containment strategy of the Cold War era. The importance of these agreements has been amplified by the fact that security concerns have played such a large role in Korean affairs since 1953. With the creation of the demilitarized zone at the end of the war and the inability to achieve a satisfactory peace arrangement, the threat, or at least the perceived threat of imminent hostilities, has been a part of life for two generations. This familiarity has led to a fairly high degree of complacency, especially among South Korean and American policy makers, concerning the adequacy of these two agreements as the basis for sustained military cooperation.

Given the changing security environment in Northeast Asia, this complacency is difficult to understand. Unless one assumes that U.S. and ROK shared interests are limited to maintaining the status quo on the peninsula; it seems reasonable to expect that there would be some discussion between the two on how to reorient the security relationship in the post-Cold War era. Clearly, this type of dialogue was taking place in the late 1980s and is reflected in the Department of Defense's 1990 report to Congress on developing a security strategy for the Asia Pacific for the next century.¹ With specific reference to Korea, this strategy called for a transition from a "leading to supporting" role for the U.S. and a reduced U.S. force structure on the peninsula.² However, as indicated in the 1992 follow-up report, the transition was postponed "until the dangers and uncertainties surrounding the North Korean nuclear weapons program have been thoroughly addressed."³

Meanwhile, there have been developments both on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia that have altered the overall security framework. These changes have significantly impacted the relationships between North Korea and the U.S. as well as North and South Korea. For example, the North and South signed the Agreement on Reconciliation Non-aggression and Exchange in early 1992. South Korea and China established formal diplomatic ties in 1992. North Korea formally withdrew from the Military Armistice Commission in 1994. The U.S. and the DPRK signed the Agreed Framework in 1994. Beyond the Korean peninsula, the changes are even more dramatic. The Soviet Union is gone. China has emerged as a potential threat to U.S. interests in East Asia, as it appears to be building its military forces as part of an effort to become a regional power.⁴

Despite these changes, the American security strategy for Korea has consistently focused on maintaining the present force structure of 37,000 as a part of the 100,000 person force in the Pacific. There is no longer any mention of further restructuring forces stationed on the peninsula to complete the transition from “leading to supporting.” Instead, there has been a tendency to begin defining the American military commitment in Korea in terms of its “stabilizing” or “balancing” effect on regional security rather than its deterrence of North Korean aggression⁵. However, the basis for maintaining forces in Korea has not extended beyond the confines of the existing security relationships.

This paper will argue that the changing relationships on the peninsula and the shift in American regional strategy are creating a strain on the U.S.-ROK alliance as a result of a divergence in security interests between the U.S. and the ROK. Further, it will argue that the U.S. must make some adjustments in its security relationship with the ROK to ensure its long-term security interests are served in a post-confrontation Korea.

To gain an appreciation for the complexity of the problem, it is necessary to understand the underlying dynamics of several inter-related processes. These include the evolution of the U.S.-ROK military relationship, the North-South reconciliation process, the establishment of bilateral contact between the U.S. and North Korea, and the shift in American regional security interests in the post-Cold War era. Although each of these elements can be analyzed discretely, they are integrally related to the divergence in security interests between the U.S. and the ROK. With that framework in place, the analysis will conclude with recommendations for ensuring American regional security interests are served in a post-Armistice Korea.

Notes

¹ Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Looking toward the 21st Century, a Report to Congress*. (Washington DC: Assistant Secretary of Defense [International Security Affairs] April 1990), 17.

² Ibid. pp.9-10.

³ Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: A Report to Congress*. (Washington DC: Assistant Secretary of Defense [International Security Affairs] 1992), 20.

⁴ Although there is still a lively debate within the U.S. concerning the threat from China, the fact is that within the U.S., there is a general recognition that China is an emerging military power in East Asia. The policy debate is essentially over how to deal with the emergence of China and Japan as the new military powers in the region. For a perspective on opposing mainstream views see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "The Case for Deep Engagement," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (July/August 1995), 90-102; and Chalmers Johnson and E.B. Keehn, "The Pentagon's Ossified Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (July/August 1995), 103-114. Also see Richard Bernstein and Ross. H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*, New York: Knopf, 1996.

⁵ Hans A. Binnendijk and Patrick Clawson, eds., *Strategic Assessment 1997: Flashpoints and Force Structure*, Washington DC: National Defense University, Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997, 104-105; White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*. Washington DC: The White House, May 1997, pp.23-24.

Chapter 2

U.S.-ROK Military Relations

Background

The American commitment to involvement in Korea stems from the 1950 decision to assist South Korea in response to the North Korean invasion in June of that year. In fact, the basis for the current American presence in Korea can be found in commitments made at the end of the Korean conflict in 1953. The military relationship between the U.S. and the ROK is based on the both the Military Armistice Agreement, signed on 27 July 1953, and the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, signed in October 1953 and put into force in November 1954, after ratification by the legislatures in each country. Created in the context of the end of hostilities on the peninsula, these documents have served as the basis for the military alliance between the two countries since that time. Both sides have found it useful to use the substance of the documents to advance its own interests while outwardly maintaining the appearance of inseparable cohesion of purpose.

It is important to recognize that from the beginning there have been fundamental differences between the two allies on the importance of the two documents. As Bailey correctly points out, ROK President Syngman Rhee was violently opposed to accepting the Armistice since he and his government regarded the entire notion of an armistice without complete military victory over the North as unsatisfactory.¹ Accordingly, it was

the U.S. that demanded ROK acceptance of the Armistice Agreement as an appropriate instrument to end the hostilities.² In response, the ROK government demanded the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty to provide assurance that the U.S. would help defend the South from a re-invasion from the North, along with assistance in rebuilding the South's military and economic infrastructure.³ The price President Rhee had to pay for that assurance, however, was to leave the ROK military forces under the control of the United Nations Command (UNC) after the armistice was signed.⁴ This arrangement was viewed as the minimally satisfactory solution for all parties. The U.S. kept the commitment of the other 15 countries that provided combat forces during conflict to defend Korea from a subsequent attack from the north.⁵ The North Koreans and Chinese received the assurance that the ROK forces would be under the control of the UNC.⁶ The ROK received a one billion-dollar reconstruction program, an American commitment to defend South Korea from attack without prior consultation with the other UNC countries, and the permanent presence of U.S. ground, air and naval forces on the peninsula.⁷ That the two sides reconciled their differences and made the two documents the cornerstone of an enduring security alliance for the past 45 years is a tribute to both parties' ability to emphasize the positive aspects of each document. The fact that the alliance has begun to show signs of unraveling in the post-Cold War environment is a reminder of the differences that have been overlooked for the sake of mutually supportive individual objectives over the years.

Strategic Interests

From the onset of the post-conflict alliance, it was clear that different interests motivated each party. Regional interests associated with the containment of communism

motivated the U.S. More specifically, the U.S. viewed its military commitment in Korea in terms of maintaining stability in the region.⁸ Immediately after the end of the conflict, all major powers generally agreed that an American presence in Korea was important for the minimum objective of maintaining the status quo and preventing war on the peninsula. This led some to conclude that the American interest in Korea had not materially changed between 1945 and 1953. The U.S. wanted to maintain South Korea within their sphere of influence while “repelling any threats from surrounding powers.”⁹

This assessment suggests that American security interests in Korea were, in fact, derivative in that any significant disengagement would be viewed as a disengagement from the region.¹⁰ Three separate American interests in the region can be isolated. First, the U.S. had an interest in preserving its dominance in the region although this was largely justified in terms of the military containment of communism. A second important consideration for the U.S. was in maintaining access to markets and resources beneficial to American involvement and development.¹¹ Finally, there was an interest in fostering an environment where U.S. values of democracy could be instituted and maintained. Clearly, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations recognized that Syngman Rhee was not a paragon of democratic virtue.¹² Yet, based on the principles of the Truman Doctrine, the U.S. continued to support him after the war as the best alternative to create a democratic government capable of resisting communism on the peninsula.

The ROK, on the other hand, was motivated by internal security concerns. Specifically, the ROK needed the alliance with the U.S. to achieve political viability and independence. It also had an overriding interest in fostering conditions on the peninsula that would allow long-term economic development. Finally, the ROK was concerned

with the preservation of sovereignty and national security in face of the continuing threat of re-invasion from the north.

Therefore, as the alliance entered the Armistice period each party emphasized its particular interest while seeking common ground to ensure those interests were served. It is clear that, at the time, the U.S. was indisputably the strongest military power. The mere presence of the American forces on the peninsula served an obvious role in deterring any attempt at local aggression from the North. From the American perspective, the alliance served to deter the Soviets or the Chinese from encouraging any adventurism on the peninsula.¹³ A second important function of the alliance was that the Mutual Defense Treaty provided the framework for stationing U.S. forces on the peninsula.¹⁴ The presence of these forces provided the linkage that Syngman Rhee considered crucial to ROK survival. The U.S. security interests in the region were now linked both symbolically and physically to some semblance of order on the peninsula. By extension, the alliance affirmed the legitimacy and durability of the ROK.¹⁵ However, the ROK government saw this “accommodation” as an interim measure. Clearly, Syngman Rhee never gave up his vision of reunifying the peninsula under the auspices of the ROK.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Koreans emphasized the aspects of the alliance associated with the Mutual Defense Treaty, which committed the U.S. to sustain the legitimacy of the ROK government.

Given their broader regional interests and its overriding concern with the threat from the Soviet Union and China, the U.S. focused its attention on the stability aspects of the alliance. Despite the bilateral nature of its commitment under the Mutual Defense Treaty, the U.S. emphasized the multilateral nature of the UNC. U.S. troops comprised

the bulk of the forces responsible for patrolling the Demilitarized Zone. The U.S. emphasized the importance of the supervisory mechanisms of the Armistice Agreement. Specifically, the U.S. led the effort to establish the legitimacy of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission as an independent body responsible for ensuring neither side rebuilt its military capabilities after the war.¹⁷ In addition, the U.S. dominated the composition of the UNC component of the Military Armistice Commission, which was responsible for supervising the cease-fire and resolving potential conflicts between the two militaries.¹⁸ Finally, as noted above, the U.S. Commander of the UNC retained full control of all military forces south of the DMZ. In fact, based the terminology contained in the Armistice Agreement, all territory south of the DMZ was considered to be under the control of the UNC.

Nevertheless, the common interests within the alliance of deterring/defeating a North Korean attack while preventing the rise of a regional hegemon formed the basis for continued cooperation between the U.S. and the ROK. Accordingly, armistice maintenance, deterrence, crisis management and the potential for war came to be viewed as stages in a process that was defined as defending the ROK from external aggression.¹⁹

Evolution of the Alliance

Within the context of the overriding strategic interests and the basic functions described above, the U.S.-ROK alliance has evolved over the years. Clearly, South Korea has achieved its long-term goal of economic development. The South has also become much more democratic in the process. The U.S. is an important trade partner with South, which has served the economic interests of both the U.S. and the ROK. However, success in realizing strategic interests associated with economic relationships

has led to complacency regarding the security relations between the two. Over the years, when differences arose within the alliance, the presence of the threat has been used to minimize differences on economic or political issues.

Even though American participation in the security alliance with South Korea was initially derivative, security, rather than economic or political issues, has been consistently used as the basis for continued cooperation with the ROK government. This suggests that American policy has been reactive to the ROK to the extent that the security issue has been the central factor in the ROK's interest in maintaining the alliance with the U.S. In other words, given its overriding interest in maintaining regional stability and containing the Soviet Union, the U.S. has allowed the ROK to dictate the terms of the security relationship on the peninsula as long as the ROK security interests did not conflict with those regional interests. Within that framework, it is useful to examine how the military relationships on the peninsula have evolved.

Mutual Security Relations

The first set of relationships to examine is those associated with the Mutual Security Treaty. Here the focus is on the commitment of U.S. forces to defend the South from an attack from the North. With the Armistice Agreement in place, it was in both the American and South Korean interest to retain U.S. forces as the buffer between North and South. Given Syngman Rhee's overriding concern with using the security alliance with the U.S. to prevent an attack from the North, it made sense to maintain an American "tripwire" along the DMZ. Given the American interest in maintaining the armistice along with a concern over Syngman Rhee's continued insistence on forceful unification of the peninsula, it made sense to maintain a buffer between the North and the South.²⁰

Accordingly, the presence of two American infantry divisions along the DMZ was accepted as being in the best interest of both parties. In addition, the American willingness to rebuild the ROK military was viewed as being clearly in the interest of both sides to further ensure the security of the South from communism.

With the demise of Syngman Rhee in 1960, we see the first subtle shift in the relationship. The basis for the change can perhaps be attributed to the fact that with Syngman Rhee gone, the imperative to take over the North by force lost some of its impetus. The policies of President Park Chung Hee clearly focused on economic development rather than armed confrontation. Therefore, the shift that occurred during the 1960's was that the ROK government began using the American presence as a security guarantee for a relatively benign environment to pursue economic development. This arrangement also satisfied the American strategic interests in that economic development was viewed as an important component in creating regional stability and at least the basis for democracy on the peninsula.

The first significant shift in American policy toward the alliance occurred in the early 1970's in the context of implementing the Nixon Doctrine. The doctrine stated that the U.S. would keep its treaty commitments and provide a shield if the freedom of the ally were threatened. However, it would "look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for defense."²¹ As a result, 20,000 American troops were withdrawn from the peninsula and the remaining division was withdrawn from the DMZ and replaced with soldiers from the ROK Army.²² Since the ROK Army remained subordinate to the UNC Commander under the provisions of the Mutual Defense Treaty, however, the U.S. effectively retained control over the military

alliance.²³ The withdrawal left approximately 43,000 Americans with the remaining combat division still serving as a “tripwire” in the Chorwon valley, which is considered the major strategic attack corridor on the peninsula. Nevertheless, the shift fundamentally altered the basis for the security relationship in that U.S. military forces were no longer serving as a physical buffer between the North and the South. The shift also symbolized an American move to a supporting role and the dramatic rise in the economic strength of the ROK.²⁴

The next significant shift in the military relationship occurred in response to the proposal by the Carter administration in the late 1970’s to withdraw all American ground forces from the peninsula. The proposal, which was originally announced on March 9, 1977, specifically called for the withdrawal of all U.S. ground forces from Korea in four to five years. In return, the U.S. proposed to add \$800 million to the planned \$275 million military aid package to the ROK.²⁵ This proposal was eventually withdrawn based on a reassessment of the relative strength of the North Korean military and the impact the withdrawal would have on regional stability.²⁶ The specific concern was that other countries in the region would perceive the withdrawal as a lack of U.S. commitment to maintaining stability in East Asia. Therefore, one can conclude that regional security interests played an important part in the decision to leave the American ground forces on the peninsula.

Despite the decision to halt the withdrawal, other actions associated with it proceeded. This included the establishment of the Combined Forces Command in November of 1978, which was to be commanded by the American General who would continue to serve concurrently as the Commander of the UNC. This arrangement

effectively removed ROK military forces from the UNC and placed them under the operational control of the CFC. The significance of this shift was that the CFC would be subject to the control of the joint U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Committee. For the first time since the decision by Syngman Rhee in 1950 to place ROK forces under the control of the UNC, the ROK had regained at least some control over its military.²⁷

The net effect was that the ROK strengthened its position within the alliance. Clearly, the creation of CFC both solidified the “mutual” nature of the U.S.-ROK relationship as envisioned by Syngman Rhee when he demanded the acceptance of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953 and weakened the authority of the UNC. With the loss of operational control, the new role for the UNC was described as armistice maintenance. In practice, this meant that the UNC had been reduced to monitoring the activity of ROK forces guarding the DMZ. Therefore, we see the U.S. allowing the ROK to dictate the terms of the mutual relationship as long as the wider U.S. interests in regional stability and sustained economic relationships could be accommodated.²⁸ The fact was that by the late 1970’s the U.S. ground force was becoming a symbol of the American commitment in the region even though its capabilities were limited to deterring an attack from the north.

The final attempt to shift relationships within the security alliance occurred in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense’s East Asia Strategic Initiative in the late 1980’s. Written in the context of a regional policy extending to the year 2000, one of the major goals of the initiative was to reduce the American ground force presence on the Korean peninsula. However, this time the approach was more cautious. With specific reference to Korea, the 1990 DOD report to Congress on the initiative lists one of the

objectives as “transition U.S. forces on the peninsula from a leading to supporting role, including some force reductions.”²⁹ Having learned the lesson from the Carter proposal in 1977, this version of the proposal called for a troop withdrawal in three phases over a ten-year period with bilateral consultation throughout the process. Accordingly, the proposal called for a modest force reduction of 7,000 personnel (2,000 Air Force and 5,000 Army) by the end of the first phase in 1993. More importantly, the proposal also called for the transition of leadership to the ROK military. In phase I this included the appointment of a ROK Major General as the senior officer assigned to UNC component of the Military Armistice Commission in 1991 and the assignment of a ROK Army general as the Combined Ground Component Commander in 1992.³⁰ Therefore, not only would the shrinking U.S. ground force become even more symbolic, but the battlefield would be turned over to Korean generals as well.³¹ Additionally, The U.S. wanted the ROK to increase its share of the burden for expenses associated with maintaining forces on the peninsula.³² Although force reductions associated with this proposal were suspended after completion of the first phase in response to the North Korean nuclear weapons development, the transition to Korean leadership and the demand for increased funding was to continue.³³ Accordingly, in December 1994, daily operational control of ROK forces was given to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Therefore, once again, the ROK came out of the process with increased prestige. The U.S. ground force remained in place as a “tripwire” deterrent in the middle of the peninsula. The ROK had taken daily operational control of its forces, while the U.S. retained responsibility in that an American general remained the commander of both the

CFC and the UNC. However, the U.S. had also begun putting a “price tag” on its willingness to retain its ground forces on the peninsula.

Armistice Relations

The Military Armistice Agreement (AA) is the other basic foundation stone to the U.S.-ROK security alliance. Since the end of the conflict the AA has served as the sole legal basis for the cease-fire on the peninsula. Signed by the Commander-in-chief of the UNC and the Supreme Commander of the Korean People’s Army along with the Commander of the Chinese People’s Volunteers,³⁴ the preamble states that the objective is “a complete cessation of hostilities and of all acts of armed force in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved...” This statement is the basis of the UNC’s commitment at the negotiations in Panmunjom to ensure Syngman Rhee would not resume hostilities after the signing of the AA. The preamble goes on to state that, “the terms and conditions are intended to be purely military in character and to pertain solely to the belligerents in Korea.” That the AA was meant to be a temporary cease-fire is made clear in Article IV, Recommendations to the Governments. It states that “the military Commanders of both sides hereby recommend to the governments of the countries concerned on both sides that, within three (3) months after the Armistice Agreement is signed and becomes effective, a political conference of a higher level of both sides be held by representatives appointed respectively to settle through negotiation the questions of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korea question, etc.”

The first issue that arises from the AA itself is the status of the ROK. Some people, especially North Koreans, assert that the lack of a ROK signature on the AA means that

the ROK is not a “party to the Armistice.”³⁵ It is clear from the language in the AA and the fact that the commanders of the respective militaries signed the document in anticipation of a political settlement that it would not be appropriate to have a political entity such as the ROK government sign the document.³⁶ However, based on this rationale, the UNC remains the responsible party for enforcing the AA and cannot be eliminated unless one is willing to re-engage the other parties to the armistice in a discussion on a successor.³⁷

The second, related issue, is what “government’s” the Commanders had in mind when making their recommendation for a political settlement? There are several interesting academic questions that arise from the recommendation since the conference was not successful.³⁸ However, the fact is that the 1954 conference in Geneva included representatives from all 16 countries that provided combat forces to the UNC with the exception of South Africa along with the Republic of Korea.³⁹ It is equally true that following the failure to reach any peace settlement at the conference, aside from the U.S. and ROK, there was little interest on the part of most governments in sustained involvement on the Korean issue.⁴⁰

Following the failure of the Geneva Conference to find a solution, the supervisory mechanisms associated with the Armistice Agreement became the sole channel of communication for resolving conflicts on the peninsula. However, once it became clear that the AA was not going to be a short-term arrangement, the mechanisms were adjusted through a series of subsequent agreements that significantly limited their effectiveness. First, the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission was prevented from accomplishing its original mission of preventing the rearmament of both South and North Korea.

Although each side blamed the other for the failure, the fact is that by 1957 the NNSC was reduced to a largely ceremonial role of accepting reports from each side and providing them to the other. The fact that the reports never changed and that the NNSC had no real authority to challenge the information being provided was overlooked or ignored. Beyond this, the NNSC did remain a useful conduit of communication between the two sides until the early 1990's, when the North Koreans began refusing to provide support to its side of the commission.

The other, more important, supervisory mechanism was the Military Armistice Commission. Charged with the responsibility to supervise the cease-fire, the MAC became the single forum for communicating with the North. In fact, until the early 1980's, it was official U.S. policy to avoid any contact with representatives of North Korea outside the confines of the MAC. Comprised of 10 officers, with five appointed from each side, the MAC became an important venue for resolving military conflicts both within and outside of the DMZ. Although originally dominated by American officers, after 1961 the UNCMAC was made up of one senior U.S. Flag officer who served as the spokesman, one British Flag Officer, two Korean flag officers and one additional member from those countries maintaining liaison with the UNC. Over the years, the MAC became an important forum for the North to establish contact with the U.S., which was clearly demonstrated on several occasions, but especially during the 1968 *Pueblo* crisis. However, since plenary sessions were open to the public, the MAC also became an excellent forum for rather outlandish propaganda statements and "upstage tactics" between the two sides.⁴¹

The MAC stopped functioning as a supervisory mechanism in 1991 when, as part of the effort to increase the leadership role of the ROK in the alliance, the decision was made to appoint a ROK general officer as the Senior member of the UNCMAC delegation. Claiming that a ROK officer could not serve as a spokesman for the command, since the ROK was not a “party to the Armistice,” the North refused to attend any more plenary meetings. Three years later, with the UNC refusing to appoint an American as the senior delegate, the North formally withdrew from the MAC. By 1995, the North had also expelled the last members of the NNSC and convinced the Chinese to “recall” the Chinese delegation to the MAC. Therefore, with the exception of the paragraphs dealing with the cease-fire and maintenance of the demilitarized zone, the Armistice Agreement has become irrelevant.

Conclusions and Summary

An examination of the military relations between the U.S. and the ROK make it clear that there has been a significant shift, despite the fact that the two underlying documents have remained essentially the same. Given the derivative nature of the U.S. interests in military relationship, it should not be surprising that the trend has been toward a strengthening of the ROK within the relationship. In fact, what emerges from the analysis is that the U.S. has consistently sought ways to reduce its presence on peninsula. However, in each case, the quid was for the ROK to increase its military strength, rather than a reduction in force structure north of the DMZ. This has led some South Korean analysts to conclude that the U.S. is primarily concerned with the impact the military balance on the peninsula would have on regional stability rather than reunification.⁴²

Another important issue within the alliance is the persistence of the unequal partnership based on the formulations contained within the original Mutual Defense Treaty and the Armistice Agreement. From an American perspective, this problem is more perplexing. Clearly, CFC was created and the “leading to supporting” proposal was put forward in recognition of the need to enhance the position of the ROK within the alliance. However, the North’s continued refusal to accept the ROK military as a legitimate partner, prevents the U.S. from moving further. The problem for the U.S. occurs in that while it lacks the leverage over the North to force acceptance of the ROK, the maintenance of ultimate U.S. control over the ROK military is building resentment within the alliance. Being tied to these outdated and moribund mechanisms, the formal structures associated with the military relationship between the U.S. and the ROK remain bounded by the Cold War and focused on the continued hostility between the North and the South. This has prevented the U.S. from effectively incorporating its military relationship with the ROK into an overall security strategy for East Asia.

Notes

¹ Sidney D. Bailey, *The Korean Armistice*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, 134-146.

² Kim Gye-Dong, *Foreign Intervention in Korea*, Aldershot Hants, England: Dartmouth Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993, 368.

³ Richard M. Curasi, “The Korean War Armistice: Relevant or Relic?” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* V, no. 2 (Winter 1993), 179-180.

⁴ Kim Gye-Dong, 396.

⁵ The other 15 Nations (Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, France, Philippines, Thailand, South Africa, Ethiopia, Colombia, Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg) agreed to sign a declaration pledging to defend the ROK if the

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communists attacked after the armistice was signed based on President Rhee's commitment to place the ROK military under the control of the UNC. Kim Gye-Dong, 390-393.

⁶ The issue of UNC control of ROK forces was the subject of several negotiating sessions at the close of the Armistice negotiations in Panmunjom between 18 June and 10 July 1953. The North Korean/Chinese side demanded that the UNC provide a guarantee that the ROK forces would remain under the control of the UNC after the signing of the Armistice. United States Army Forces, Far East, *The Armistice Negotiations Korean Conflict 1951, 1952 & 1953*, Vol. 2, 251-282.

⁷ American commitment to defend the ROK without prior consultation was important to President Rhee because he felt a coordinated response would take too long to have any impact if the communists did decide to re-attack. Kim Gye-Dong, 393.

⁸ Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, 205.

⁹ Kim Gye-Dong, 431.

¹⁰ Richard L. Sneider, "Prospects for Korean Security," in *Asian Security in 1980's: Problems and Policies for a Time of Transition*, edited by Richard H. Solomon. Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain Publishers, 1979, 111-112.

¹¹ Richard W. Mansbach, "The New Order in Northeast Asia: A Theoretical Overview," *Asian Perspective* 17 no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1993), 5-15.

¹² Kim Gye-Dong, 381-383.

¹³ Kim Jung-Ik, *The Future of the U.S.-Republic of Korea Military Relationship*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, 15-17.

¹⁴ U.S. Senate, *Mutual Defense Treaty with Korea: Hearings before the Foreign Relations Committee*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, 2.

¹⁵ Patrick M. Morgan, "Assessing the Korean-American Alliance: How Do We Know When the Alliance is Healthy?" *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 1, no. 2, (Winter 1989), 127.

¹⁶ Curasi, 180-182.

¹⁷ The establishment of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission was contained in the Military Armistice Agreement, Article 2, paragraph C. The composition was four non-belligerent with two appointed by each side. The UNC nominated officers from Sweden and Switzerland while North Korea and China nominated officers from Poland and Czechoslovakia. The mission of the NNSC was to monitor ports in both South and North Korea for the introduction of weapons and investigate military incidents outside the DMZ.

¹⁸ Based on records held at the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission Secretariat in Seoul, the original composition of the UNC component of MAC was three American, one British and one Thai general officer. It was not until the 36th plenary session held in 1954 that a South Korean general replaced the Thai general.

¹⁹ Curasi, 183.

²⁰ National Unification Board, *A Comparison of the Unification Policies of South and North Korea*, (Seoul: National Unification Board, 1990), 78.

²¹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994, 708.

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²² Kim Jung-Ik, 23-24, 49.

²³ Kim Gye-Dong, 393.

²⁴ Edward A. Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988, 9-10.

²⁵ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea: A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations*, prepared by Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and John Glenn, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 1978, Committee Print, v.

²⁶ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea: An Update, 1979, A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations*, prepared by Senator John Glenn, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979, Committee Print, 1-9.

²⁷ The difference is that whereas the CINCUNC reports only to the U.S. JCS, the CINCCFC reports to the combined National Command Authorities of the U.S. and the ROK. See Kim Jung-Ik, 55-57 for a full explanation of the relationship between the two command structures.

²⁸ Senate, *Korea Troop Withdrawal, 1979 Update*, 10.

²⁹ DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1990, 9.

³⁰ DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1992, 17.

³¹ LTC Asher W. Spittler II, "A Post Cold War Military Strategy for Northeast Asia," Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1990, 20-21.

³² DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1990, 9-10.

³³ DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1992, 20.

³⁴ Peng Te-huai signed as the commander of the People's Volunteers because China never officially entered the war. Instead, the Chinese participating were technically considered volunteers to avoid international censure for assisting the north.

³⁵ This has become a consistent theme in North Korean radio broadcasts and news releases. Also see Kim Myong-Chol, "DPRK Perspective on a Post-Armistice Regional Order," 7 May 1997, 3; on line, Internet, 26 August 1997, available from <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/forum.html#4> and Kim Byong-Hong, "North Korea's Perspective on the U.S.-North Korea Peace Treaty," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, 13 no. 4 (Winter 1994), 86. However, other authors have also suggested that the ROK was not a party to the Armistice. See Robert E. Bedeski, "Arms Control Inspections, the Armistice Agreement, and New Challenges to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," 21 August 1997, online, Internet, 21 August 1997, available from <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/forum.htm#7>.

³⁶ This point is made clear by General Mark Clark in a response to a letter from KPA Supreme Commander, Kim Il-Sung and Chinese People's Commander Peng Te-Huai questioning whether the UNC can control the ROK government and the ROK Army. General Clark reminds them that the armistice is a military document and that the UNC did control the ROK Army based on Syngman Rhee's "Pusan Letter," which subordinated the ROK Army to the UNC, but not the ROK government. See United States Army Forces, Far East, 256-259.

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³⁷ The U.S., in fact, attempted to inform the UN Security Council in 1975 that the UNC would be terminated and military officers of the U.S. and ROK would be designated as successors in command to the UNC. This led to a rejection by the DPRK, which claimed that the U.S. was the “real party” to the Armistice. The U.S. proposal was withdrawn and the issue has not been seriously addressed since that time. See Patrick Norton, “Ending the Armistice: the Legal Issues,” 3 March 1997, on line, Internet, 3 March 1997, available from <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/vforum.html#3>, 11-12.

³⁸ Ibid., 14-17.

³⁹ The peace conference failed to achieve a settlement to the conflict due to disagreement over several issues including procedures for holding “free” elections, the status of the UN as a neutral observer during elections, and timing of the withdrawal of foreign troops. U.S. Department of State, *The Korea Problem at the Geneva Conference*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1954.

⁴⁰ After the conference most countries withdrew their forces from the peninsula. By 1957, all UNC countries, with the exception of the U.S., had withdrawn their combat forces from the peninsula. The Chinese removed the last of their combat forces from North Korea in 1958. Approximately half of the countries associated with the UNC have also broken liaison with the UNC. Today, there are 9 of the original 16 countries (U.S., Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Thailand, Philippines, Colombia and New Zealand) that maintain active liaison with the UNC. The ROK maintains a separate liaison with the command, but is not technically considered a part of the command.

⁴¹ A review of the proceedings of the 359 plenary meetings of the MAC, which are held at the office of the UNCMAC Secretariat, and talking to translators that have been associated with the MAC since the mid-1960’s gives one an excellent appreciation of the deteriorating quality of the meetings over the years.

⁴² Hwang In-Kwang, *The United States and Neutral Reunited Korea: Search for a New Basis of American Strategy*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990, vi-vii.

Chapter 3

North Korea and the Alliance

In the most general terms, the common interest in redefining relationships on the peninsula relates to the establishment of a permanent peace regime to replace the Armistice Agreement. Although there has certainly been a wide variety of initiatives pursued over the years, an underlying assumption has been that any peace settlement must involve some form of unification of North and South Korea. As a result, the respective governments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the ROK have viewed the peace process as a "zero sum" proposition where neither side could accept any perceived or real gain by the other side in establishing itself as a more legitimate government.

When viewed from within the context of the U.S. commitments contained in Armistice Agreement and the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty, this meant there was very little room for divergence between the U.S. and ROK interests with respect to the North. Accordingly, throughout the Cold War era the U.S. accommodated the ROK by using the Military Armistice Commission as the primary means of communication with the North for dealing with military issues and insisting that peace could only be achieved through direct North-South dialogue. From a South Korean perspective, the U.S. military commitment gave the assurance of immediate American involvement in any military

confrontation with the North, while the demand for peace through North-South dialogue served to demonstrate its legitimacy in the zero sum game as the rightful heir to the unified Korea. From the North Korean perspective, the presence of the American military was visible proof of the illegitimacy of the ROK government. The clear dominance of the U.S. in the partnership served to reinforce the North's perception that it should seek bilateral contact with the U.S. for the dual purpose of demonstrating the illegitimacy of the ROK and establishing a separate peace with the U.S.

Diplomatic Isolation and the Military Armistice Commission

Following the failure at Geneva in 1954 to reach the “peaceful settlement at a political level” anticipated in paragraph 62 of the AA, the U.S. and ROK diplomatic approach was to isolate the North. The MAC became the sole channel of direct communication for the two sides. However, it is also apparent from a review of the minutes of the 359 plenary sessions that the two sides saw the utilization of the MAC from a different perspective. The UNC treated the MAC as a strictly military forum for resolving armistice related issues such as the accounting of prisoners of war and presenting alleged violations. The North Koreans and Chinese, on the other hand, viewed the forum as an opportunity to mix political and military objectives. Between 1954 and 1958, the North Korean/Chinese side consistently brought up proposals within the MAC plenary demanding a new political conference to discuss the withdrawal of foreign forces from the peninsula.¹ In addition, the North used the plenary sessions, which were open to the public media, as a stage for voicing political propaganda.

Despite these attempts by the North to politicize the meetings, the records indicate that the UNC was very successful in resisting the pressure. The UNC, instead, focused

Armistice related issues. One specific issue was the matter of accounting for prisoners of war. The UNC believed the North had withheld information regarding 2,233 prisoners that were known to have been alive prior to the signing of the AA in 1953.² Beginning in 1954, the UNC demanded additional information regarding these individuals through the MAC. However, the North responded by claiming that it had returned all POW's and had no additional responsibility under the provisions of the AA.

The MAC also served as the venue for resolving all military conflicts between the two sides. Although primarily concerned with resolving alleged AA violations such as the introduction of illegal weapons or excessive personnel into the DMZ, the MAC also was the forum used to resolve major incidents on the peninsula. Perhaps the most significant incident that demonstrated the U.S. commitment to using the MAC as the sole communication channel with the North is the capture of the *USS Pueblo* in 1968. During the subsequent negotiations, one of initial demands made by the North was that the incident should be resolved between the North and the U.S. since the ship was in North Korean territory. Further, since it was American ship that was not under the control of the UNC, the U.S. should negotiate the release of Commander Bucher and his crew outside the auspices of the Military Armistice Commission.³ The American position was that even though the *USS Pueblo* was in international waters and not under UNC control at the time, the matter would be resolved through the Military Armistice Commission (MAC), since it was the established mechanism for resolving security issues with the North. In fact, the issue was eventually resolved through a series of "private" meetings between the Senior delegates to the MAC. The US consistently portrayed these private negotiations as being conducted under the auspices of the Armistice and emphatically

resisted any attempt by the North to portray them as bilateral negotiations.⁴ Therefore, despite high visibility and domestic political pressure within the U.S. to resolve the crisis quickly, the U.S. government maintained an official position that it would only deal with the North through the MAC to demonstrate its commitment to both the AA and the ROK.

Splitting the Alliance through Bilateral Contact

One of the fundamental premises of the U.S.-ROK alliance from the onset was a determination to prevent the North from creating conflict between the two partners. The negotiations for the return of the USS *Pueblo* are indicative of the compromises both sides were willing to make in the attempt to prevent the North from creating disharmony between the U.S. and the ROK. However, there were several other events that in hindsight might be seen as successful efforts by the North to appeal to the individual, conflicting interests of both the U.S. and the ROK.

North-South Joint Communiqué

The ROK officially ended its policy of complete isolation in the early 1970's. The initial contacts between the North and South involved a series of meetings of the respective Red Cross organizations for the purpose of discussing humanitarian issues related dispersed families.⁵ With these talks in progress the two sides initiated separate government to government talks in November 1971, which led to the issuance of a joint communiqué on 4 July 1972. The significance of the communiqué was that for the first time the two agreed that unification should be achieved through “independent efforts,” through “peaceful means” and that “a great national unity” would be sought that “transcended differences in ideas, ideologies and systems”.⁶

Despite some initial progress in establishing telephone hotlines and the South-North Coordinating Committee, by 1974 the dialogue between the two broke down over a variety of issues. Perhaps the single most important issue, however, was the status of the American forces on the peninsula. Just as occurred at the Geneva Peace Conference, the North again demanded that peace talks between the South and North could not proceed until the U.S. forces were removed, while the South again argued that the U.S. forces could not be removed until peace was established.

The event became a watershed within the U.S.-ROK alliance in that prior to this joint communiqué the issue of achieving peace was left unresolved beyond the statement in the AA calling on the “governments of the countries of both sides” settle the issue. Subsequently, the U.S. and ROK have insisted that unification and, by implication, peace on the peninsula must be resolved between the North and the South. The North, on the other hand, has insisted that there must be a separate peace treaty between both the North and the U.S. as well as between the North and the South.

Bilateral Contact on the POW/MIA Issue

The U.S. first began trying to improve bilateral relations with the North in the early 1980s through what has been termed “smile diplomacy.”⁷ The initiative was very modest and involved acknowledgement and cordial contact with representatives in the context of incidental diplomatic settings. On the peninsula, the North used the UNC’s interest in the American POW/MIA issue as its entrée to bilateral contact on military issues. The initial offer was made to an American veterans group, the “Chosin Few.” During a visit to the North in October 1985, the North Korean Foreign Minister intimated to a representative of the group that the North would cooperate in returning military remains if the U.S.

government would make a formal request to the DPRK.⁸ The same message was passed informally through MAC channels in Panmunjom. When the UNC responded in November 1985 with a formal letter requesting that the KPA initiate searches to locate and repatriate UNC war remains, the North insisted that a new bilateral agreement between the U.S. and the DPRK would be needed since the AA did not provide a framework for searching for remains.⁹

Despite the UNC's efforts, the North continued to use the POW/MIA issue to establish bilateral contact with the U.S. The first "success" occurred in 1990 when the KPA agreed to repatriate 16 sets of war remains to a U.S. congressional delegation at Panmunjom in 1990.¹⁰ Between 1990 and 1994 the North continued to repatriate remains through Panmunjom, with a total of 208 sets being repatriated during the period. Although the UNC continued to portray the repatriations as being under the auspices of the UNC, the KPA made it clear in informal contacts in Panmunjom that it was using the repatriations as a means for improving relations with the U.S.

The North eventually achieved its objective of bilateral contact with the U.S. by effectively using the issue of compensation for costs associated with the exhumation and repatriation of the remains. From the outset, it was clear that the North was interested in being compensated for the remains. Given that no other UNC country with remains in the North had expressed any willingness to pay these costs, it was assumed that the U.S. government would provide compensation for "costs incurred" since it was U.S. policy to refuse to "compensate anyone for bones." Initially, the U.S. was willing to allow the UNC to negotiate with the KPA in Panmunjom. However, as negotiations stalled and the U.S. became interested in conducting joint operations to improve the quality of remains

being returned, the U.S. Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) took over the negotiations.¹¹ The result was that the North received the “compensation” it had demanded. More importantly, however, there was also a joint press release issued which stated that both sides believed that the “agreement reached at the talks would make a positive contribution to the improvement of DPRK-U.S. relations.”¹² Therefore, more than ten years after its initial proposal, the North finally succeeded in using the POW/MIA issue for improving bilateral relations at the expense of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The UNC had been excluded from the process and the DPRK had established military-to-military contact with the U.S. outside the context of the alliance. The ROK was also left out of the process based on the fact that the repatriation was considered a “humanitarian” issue.¹³

Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchange

In the late 1980’s there was renewed progress in the dialogue process between the South and the North. After languishing for over a decade following the breakdown in talks stemming from the 1972 joint communiqué, talks picked up momentum in conjunction with Seoul hosting the Olympic games in 1988. Perhaps driven by concern that both the Soviet Union and China agreed to participate in the games, the North returned to serious negotiations with the South. The result was the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchange (ARNE), which was entered into force on 19 February 1992. From the perspective of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the significance of the agreement is that it specifically called for the South and the North “to transform the present state of armistice into a solid state of peace.”¹⁴

The ARNE also called for the establishment of several North-South commissions to address reconciliation, including the Joint Military Commission. Among other functions the Joint Military Commission would also fulfill several that duplicated those performed by the MAC. Specifically, the agreement called for the establishment of direct military hotlines which duplicated those available through the MAC, the creation of a South-North demarcation line which duplicated the Military Demarcation Line established in the AA, as well as detailed procedures for resolving disputes and conflicts between the militaries of the two sides.¹⁵

Therefore, we see the further separation of interests within the U.S.-ROK alliance in maintaining the mechanisms associated with the basis of the alliance. The fact that the ARNE makes repeated mention of both sides agreeing to maintain the AA until a satisfactory peace can be achieved suggests that both the South and the North recognized the value of maintaining the cease-fire and the DMZ. However, it is equally clear that both sides had also lost confidence in the MAC as a viable supervisory mechanism for preventing accidental conflict on the peninsula in that the creation of the Joint Military Commission, usurped the MAC's authority.

Unfortunately, the commissions established within the framework of the ARNE were never operationalized. By the time the detailed procedures and organizational structure had been finalized in late 1992, the International Atomic Energy Agency had begun challenging the North over its suspected activity in the development of a nuclear weapons capability. The talks on the ARNE reached a stalemate and the initial meeting of the Joint Military Commission never took place.

U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework and Four Party Talks

The next development in the relationship with the North occurred when the U.S. made the decision to enter into direct negotiations to prevent further development of the North's nuclear weapons capability. The October 1994 Agreed Framework (AF) between the United States and North Korea is generally viewed as a breakthrough development and has been held up as an example of success in the effort to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The general arguments are that the framework has been effective in freezing the North Korean nuclear weapons program and will serve as a mechanism for bringing North Korea out of its international isolation¹⁶.

However, few Americans appreciate how this initiative to engage North Korea in dialogue is affecting US-ROK relations. What has happened is that the US policy to actively engage North Korea has further reduced the efficacy of the Armistice Agreement and its supervisory mechanisms and is jeopardizing the long-term security relations with the ROK. The fundamental reason is that the AF is viewed as a leadership initiative by the US government. Yet, one of the underlying themes in the evolution of security relationships on the peninsula has been to place the US in either a multilateral role or in a supporting role while placing the ROK in the leadership role. Therefore, at least some South Koreans have viewed the initiative with ambivalence or, in some cases outright hostility¹⁷.

In fairness to the crafters of the AF, they did recognize the importance of including the ROK as a principal in the process. The original language calls for the resumption of North-South dialogue as an underlying condition for implementation.¹⁸ In the process of implementation, however, the North has insisted that the statement be interpreted to mean that the AF itself will provide the "atmosphere" for a resumption of North-South

dialogue.¹⁹ There was also a sincere effort to include the ROK in the process during implementation when US negotiators insisted that the reactors would be of South Korean origin. However, as a result of North Korean insistance, they were only partly successful. Accordingly, the agreement reached on the supply contract for the light water reactors specifies that although the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) would choose the reactors, the US would serve as the principal point of contact with the DPRK for the project and that the reactors would be of “US-origin design and technology...”²⁰

A similar situation has developed with respect to the April 1996 U.S.-ROK proposal for Four Party Talks between the U.S., ROK, DPRK and the People’s Republic Of China (PRC). In this case, the formal language in the original proposal emphasized that the North and the South would assume the primary roles in the dialogue process.²¹ However, in the effort to initiate dialogue, the North has forced the US into a leadership role while the South has clearly been placed in a subordinate role. For example, in each of preparatory meetings held between the US, North and South Korea in New York, the North accepted the proposal only after the US agreed to bilateral meeting immediately following the three way meeting.²² Similarly, the latest agreement by the North to hold the second round of talks between the four prinicipals was made in bilateral meeting with US representatives and includes a provision for a separate US-DPRK meeting before the four party meeting. Again, the North has succeeded in building the case for the argument that regardless of US and ROK claims, the two principals in the process are the US and the DPRK.

When viewed in isolation, one could perhaps make the argument that despite these temporary setbacks in achieving meaningful dialogue and cooperation between North and South, the AF and the Four Party Talks represent significant steps in promoting peace and stability on the peninsula. However, when viewed in the context of the long-standing North Korean strategy of attempting to engage the US in bilateral dialogue on security issues, they become more problematic.²³ From this perspective, not only can these initiatives be viewed as an American concession to accepting the North's demand for bilateral contact, but as milestones in a successful strategy to shift American policy in Korea. An examination of American actions in response to military crises and official policy statements serve to demonstrate how this perception of success by the North is being perpetuated.

U.S.-DPRK Peace Ensuring Mechanism

Following the withdrawal of the North from the MAC in 1994, the Korean People's Army component began making contact with U.S. officers assigned to the UNC with a proposal to restructure the mechanism into a bilateral arrangement between the U.S. and the DPRK.²⁴ In a definitive statement issued by the DPRK Foreign Ministry in February 1996, the North claims that "it is a stark reality that all issues related to peace and security on the Korean peninsula, including the DPRK-U.S. agreement to solve the nuclear issue, can be solved only by us and the United States." The statement goes on to indicate that while the North views a "peace agreement" between the U.S. and the DPRK as "imperative" in the future, there is an immediate need for new interim "peace-guarantee system...to maintain the state of the armistice in a peaceful way."²⁵ The agreement would include procedures for managing the DMZ, resolving conflicts, and

other matters concerning the maintenance of security on the peninsula. It would also create a joint U.S.-DPRK military body to supervise the agreement in place of the MAC. Therefore, the establishment of this “tentative agreement” would put in place a supervisory mechanism that would duplicate the functions of the South-North Joint Military Commission and provide a dual channel of communication for the North. Thus far, the U.S. and the ROK have resisted pressure from the North to accept such a formula. However, the proposal has created additional conflict in that the two alliance partners differ in their response. The South has argued that the only alternative is for the North to return to the MAC and considers the North’s proposal as yet another attempt to create a bilateral contact with the U.S., which excludes the South.²⁶ The U.S., on the other hand, has been more willing to maintain contact to discuss the issue with the North based on the recognition that the North will not return to the MAC as long as a South Korean general officer continues to serve as the spokesman for the UNC.

The Shift in U.S. Policy

The net effect of these developments in relations with the North is the re-emergence of the U.S. as the primary partner within the U.S.-ROK alliance. The shift is clearly seen in the American response to North Korean demands in two highly publicized military incidents that occurred after the dialogue between the U.S. and the DPRK on the AF began in the summer of 1994.

The first incident is the shoot down of an OH-58 helicopter that occurred in December 1994. The basic facts of the case were that two American pilots became disoriented and flew across the Demilitarized Zone into North Korean airspace. North Korean soldiers shot down the helicopter killing one pilot and capturing the other.

Based on past precedent, this incident was clearly within the purview of the MAC to resolve. It was a military aircraft with UNC forces aboard and it occurred along the DMZ. First, then U.S. Representative Bill Richardson, who happened to be in Pyongyang at the time, immediately became involved in negotiating the return of the remains of the dead pilot. Second, despite attempts by the Secretary of the UNCMAC to engage the North Koreans in Panmunjom, the U.S. chose to dispatch a State Department representative to Pyongyang to secure the release of the captured pilot. Here, the North succeeded in getting the representative to sign an agreement calling for “military talks between the two sides in the appropriate forum²⁷.” Although the U.S. subsequently argued that the “appropriate forum” meant the MAC, the North did not share that interpretation and immediately began calling for a meeting between American and North Korean general officers to prevent future conflict and confrontation on the peninsula.²⁸ Clearly, the U.S. response to the incident was driven by the significant public demand in the U.S. to have the live pilot returned before Christmas. Nevertheless, the willingness to send a State Department representative to Pyongyang rather than demand that the North respond through the established “crisis management” channel of the MAC sent a significant message that the U.S. had lost confidence in the ability of the MAC to perform its primary function.

A significant factor in the negotiation process was this incident became the first “military crisis” on the peninsula since the North had announced its formal withdrawal from the MAC earlier in 1994.²⁹ The fact that the US did not respond in more assertive fashion to the withdrawal may have actually served to embolden the North to use the helicopter incident to pursue its case for establishing bilateral contact in the context of a

military crisis. A second factor that certainly influenced the US reaction to both the North's withdrawal from the MAC and the helicopter incident is that they occurred within the context of the negotiations over the Agreed Framework. In fact, part of the North's negotiating strategy during the helicopter incident was that it would renounce its commitment to the AF if the U.S. did not apologize for the incident and admit the aircraft was on a spy mission.³⁰

A second incident that demonstrates an even more dramatic shift in handling military incidents occurred in 1996 when a North Korean submarine was discovered grounded in shallow water off the coast of Kangnung, South Korea, which is approximately 75 kilometers south of the Demilitarized Zone. The South Korean military immediately undertook a massive manhunt for the 26 crew members who came ashore and demanded an apology from the North. Eventually, 24 of the 26 were killed south of the DMZ. The initial response by Secretary of State Warren Christopher was "all parties must show self-restraint in order to prevent a worse situation."³¹ The response from the North was that it would withdraw from the Agreed Framework if the crewmen were not returned.³² Despite the South's demand for a direct apology from the North, the incident was eventually resolved through negotiations between the US and the North in New York. The North issued its statement of regret, which was touted as an apology, and the US claimed to consult closely with the South throughout the negotiations. The MAC was left with the task of returning the cremated bodies of the dead crewmen. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that the US resolved the incident through bilateral negotiations with the North completely outside the auspices of the MAC or the Armistice Agreement on behalf of the ROK. In other words, the US had fully acceded to the North's long-

standing strategy to engage the US in bilateral dialogue on security matters. There was no longer any pretense of dealing through the MAC even though the incident was a classic example of an Armistice Agreement violation. In effect, the US response signaled a lack of confidence in the supervisory mechanisms of the Armistice and an overriding interest in maintaining the North's commitment to the Agreed Framework. From North Korean perspective, the US response made it reasonable to assume that it would be possible to engage the US in bilateral dialogue in response to any future military incident on peninsula.

The shift in US policy is also reflected in its official statements concerning Korea. Here, one sees an increasing lack of confidence in the Armistice Agreement and a tacit acceptance of the North Korean view that the "...armistice mechanism, being a remnant of the cold war era, remains the biggest roadblock to the efforts to establish peace and bring about rapprochement on the Korean peninsula."³³

The first statement comes from the 1995 version of the US Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region. It says: "until North and South Korea find a peaceful solution to their differences, we remain committed to the terms of the forty-five year old Armistice Agreement. The Armistice Agreement and its mechanisms must remain until an appropriate agreement supersedes them. Only South and North Korea can resolve the division of Korea, and therefore the replacement of Armistice by an appropriate agreement can come about only through direct dialogue between South and North Korea."³⁴

Reading this statement leaves no doubt that the US is committed to the Armistice and the restoration of the supervisory mechanism in anticipation of North-South dialogue.

However, that statement stands in stark contrast to the one contained in the 1997 National Security Strategy from the White House. Here, we read that “a peaceful resolution of the Korean conflict with a non-nuclear peninsula is in our strategic interest. A parallel strategic interest is the elimination of a chemical/biological threat on the peninsula. A productive North-South dialogue would be a positive step in this direction. We are working to create conditions of stability by maintaining the US-Republic of Korea treaty alliance and our military presence; freezing and eventually dismantling the North Korean nuclear program...; developing bilateral contacts with the North...; and following through on the offer of four-party peace talks.”³⁵

There is no mention of the Armistice Agreement. In fact, from a North Korean perspective, one can again see significant progress: The US remains strongly committed to implementation of the Agreed Framework. The US military is no longer in Korea to maintain the Armistice, but to *create* conditions of stability. Productive North-South dialogue is no longer a mandatory pre-condition for peace but would simply be a *positive step*. Instead, the US is going to develop bilateral contacts with the North.

The significant problem with this shift in policy is that the underlying security relationships on the peninsula remain unchanged. In fact, all parties have continued to claim that they will continue to abide by the Armistice Agreement until a state of peace is achieved between the South and the North.³⁶ Accordingly, despite the fact that the North has withdrawn from the MAC, the US, through the UNC, continues to maintain its MAC

delegation with the implicit understanding that it will never be used for the purpose specified in the Armistice Agreement. Similarly, the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission continues to maintain a presence in South Korea even though the North has removed its delegation and turned its facilities into a restaurant for tourists visiting the JSA. The point to be made is that the US and the ROK are sustaining these non-functioning Armistice maintenance mechanisms with no apparent purpose other than to claim adherence to the Armistice Agreement because it is the basis for their security relationship.

The 1996 submarine incident demonstrates the case. First, based on Paragraphs 12, 14 and 15 of the Armistice Agreement, the UNC should have been in charge of the investigation of the incident because it was an invasion of territory under the control of the UNC and not of ROK sovereign territory. However, the response to the incident was managed entirely by the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff using ROK military forces. The UNC was allowed to send an “investigative team” only after the ROK military had completed its “investigation” which included a significant manipulation of evidence to include the removal of all North Korean equipment and the rearrangement of dead bodies. Yet, the requirements in paragraph 42 of the Armistice Agreement actually require an investigation by the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission. Again, we see that the US and the ROK have left the form in place, while the function has been lost.

The more significant problem with the shift in US policy is that it has not been reconciled with previous commitments by the US to shift from a “leading to a supporting” role on the peninsula. Ever since the North-South Joint Communiqué in 1972, the goal has been to force the North to deal directly with the South on finding a

peaceful solution to the Korean conflict. Yet, since the early 1990's when the U.S. interests in non-proliferation appear to have taken precedence over its interest in promoting ROK as the leading partner in the coalition, there has been little progress in North-South relations. Since the appointment of a ROK general as the Senior Member to UNC component of the MAC in 1991, the North has simply refused to accept the legitimacy of the MAC and the US has not objected. Despite the conclusion of the North-South Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression and Exchange in 1992, the North has refused to deal with the South on security matters. The US response has been to act as an intermediary, effectively using the façade of its “special relationship” with the South as an excuse for sustaining the North’s commitment to the AF. Despite the fact that the South is funding nearly 70 percent of the Light Water Reactor project, the North insists on using the U.S. as the middleman. Finally, despite stipulations in both the Agreed Framework and the Four Party Peace Talk proposal that the North would have to engage in dialogue the South, the North has successfully ignored the ROK government since talks between the two broke off in July of 1994 following the death of Kim Il-Sung. Therefore, in effect, the shift in US policy has been to delay the eventual confrontation between the North and the South over the unification issue and, ultimately, the security relationship between the two adversaries.

That is not to suggest that South Korea is satisfied with the current situation. The reaction to the Christopher statement calling for “cooler heads” in response to the submarine incident was indicative of the growing frustration. Several were incredulous that the US, which had been such a staunch ally in the past, could possibly take a neutral position on such a blatant violation of the Armistice Agreement.³⁷ An editorial following

the groundbreaking ceremony for the light water reactors recently commented that the project “has set a bad precedent in which the DPRK is being rewarded for military threats.”³⁸ Ku Chong-so of the Samsung Economic Research Institute warns that “North Korea’s survival strategy coincides with the US hegemony strategy. Both the United States and North Korea pursue a policy of ‘two Koreas.’ The ROK should be on the alert against and halt the strategic alliance between North Korea and the United States.”³⁹

Meanwhile, some American scholars have taken up what could be viewed as the logical conclusion of the American policy shift. Specifically, they have begun advocating that the US should assume a more neutral role in Korea.⁴⁰ Although the arguments differ slightly, these authors end up suggesting that the US should reach some type of peace settlement with the North. They essentially argue that the US should remove itself from the untenable position of maintaining a strong defense alliance with the South while engaging the North in bilateral contact despite the fact that the North refuses any direct contact with the South. Again, we reach the point where we see that the shift in US policy to actively engage the North while maintaining the structures associated with the security relationships which effectively preclude that bilateral contact creates a potential for increased conflict within the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Diverging Interests and Opportunities for Change

Despite joint declarations that the alliance is strong, the fact is there has been a divergence of interests between the U.S. and the South since the end of the cold war. A complicating factor has been that the North, following the reduction of support from both the Soviet Union and China, has also begun modifying its strategy with respect to the alliance. If the U.S. is to preserve its security interests in Northeast Asia in the context of

the U.S.-ROK security alliance, it will be necessary to make some changes that are compatible with the interests of both parties. However, the options available to the U.S. are constrained by its dependence on continued support from the ROK in shouldering the cost of maintaining U.S. forces on the peninsula and its commitment to maintain the formal control mechanisms of the MAC and the Alliance command structure. Another, potentially more difficult problem, is that the end of the cold war has led to a renewed questioning of how Korea fits into the structure of American security interests in Northeast Asia. Simultaneously, both South and North Korea have begun re-evaluating how the U.S. fits into their respective visions for peace or unification on the peninsula.

U.S. Interests

Since the end of the cold war, the dominant U.S. interest in Northeast Asia has been the retention of its security influence in the region through the forward basing of U.S. forces. As in the past, the primary mechanism for achieving this influence is the U.S.-Japan security relationship. The recent updating of the 1978 security agreement between the U.S. and Japan in October 1997 is a testament to the importance the U.S. places on the relationship. The fact that the update focuses on the importance of Japanese and American cooperation in regional security issues confirms that the U.S. continues to see Japan as its primary partner in maintaining its presence in the region.⁴¹

The new focus of U.S. attention in maintaining a security presence is the containment of China. As Layne correctly points out, although this containment policy may be portrayed as a policy of engagement, it is really a hegemonic strategy driven by the need for economic stability in the region and ultimately to contain both China and Japan.⁴² Despite the rhetoric regarding engagement, American interests appear to be

focused on finding ways to sustain a stable economic climate in the region without addressing the problem of the emerging security competition within the region with China and Japan becoming the key players. Accordingly, the U.S. policy with respect to Korea has been couched in terms of the value of the alliance with the South and increased bilateral contact with the North in preserving stability, which, in turn, will contribute to prosperity on the peninsula and in the region.⁴³ From this perspective, the “package deal” negotiated in the Agreed Framework was an acceptable compromise because it offered a way to stabilize the North Korean nuclear program in exchange for a phased process of engaging the North in dialogue and cooperation.⁴⁴

South Korean Interests

The primary interest of the ROK on the other hand has remained focused first on the elimination of the North Korean threat. In the “zero sum” mentality of the South, the elimination of the threat from the North remains paramount and has consistently been cast in terms of Korean unification on terms favorable to the South. In fact, most authors make the assumption that a unified Korean nation will be an “enlarged version of the ROK.”⁴⁵ Despite encouragement or perhaps even coercion by the U.S., the South has maintained policies of pressure and containment of the North rather than demonstrating any spirit of compromise or constructive dialogue.⁴⁶ From this perspective, the retention of U.S. forces on the peninsula along with the maintenance of the security alliance and the Armistice Agreement are still seen in terms of providing a deterrent to the North. However, the decision to conclude a “package deal” in the Agreed Framework rather than limit it to the nuclear issue was extremely undesirable because this provided the North an opportunity to negotiate peninsular security, political and economic issues outside the

context of the North-South dialogue channels.⁴⁷ In short, the Agreed Framework has not only extended a lifeline to the North, but it also gave the North an escape route from the zero sum unification policies of the South.

Beyond unification the South's interest ultimately is focused on protection from other regional powers through a self-sufficient defense posture.⁴⁸ In this scenario, the South has much less confidence that the continuation of the alliance with the U.S. will be useful or attractive. Accordingly, the South has developed plans to build a significant naval capacity capable of defending its maritime interests in neighboring seas and well beyond.⁴⁹ In geopolitical terms, some South Korean writers argue that a multilateral approach to security relationships is the best way for Korea to secure its future in a region where the influence of the U.S. will wane in the context of a reunified Korea and an increasingly strong China and Japan.⁵⁰ For some, this inevitable transition began with the virtual elimination of support to the North from both China and Russia and the overall improvement in cooperation between Japan, Russia, China, and the South.⁵¹

North Korean Interests

With the loss of support from the Soviet and China, the primary interest of the North has shifted to survival of the regime. The continuity with the past is anchored in the North's attempt to achieve that survival through the establishment of bilateral contact with the U.S. To the extent that establishing and developing that bilateral relationship creates a rift within the U.S.-ROK alliance, the North's efforts continue to reflect the zero sum mentality of North-South relations in the cold war era. However, a compelling case can be made for the argument that the North, at least in the short to mid-term, views mere survival as an end unto itself.⁵² Support for this argument is seen in two areas.

First, from the North Korean perspective, the October 1994 Agreed Framework represents a critical element in its survival strategy. As Robert Manning states “Pyongyang would trade its ultimate insurance policy—its nuclear weapons program—for a new economic and political engagement with the U.S., the ROK, and Japan.”⁵³ From the onset, it has been a fundamental assumption that the North would accept a “package deal” because it recognized its vulnerability to economic weakness and international isolation.⁵⁴

Further evidence suggesting the North views the Agreed Framework in terms of regime survival is found in its interpretation of the requirement to engage in North-South dialogue. Specifically, the North has chosen to interpret the phrase that the Agreed Framework “will help create an environment that promotes such dialogue” to mean that it must accrue political and economic benefits prior to any engagement in dialogue.⁵⁵ The patience being shown by the North in achieving this objective is testimony to the weakness of its position.

A second area where the North’s interest in regime survival is evident is regarding the retention of U.S. forces on the peninsula. Although the removal of U.S. forces has been a longstanding demand by the North, there is increasing evidence that at least the timing for removal of these forces has become much more negotiable since the end of the cold war. According to Kwak Tae-Hwan, this moderated position first appeared in 1990 when the North called for a phased (but complete) withdrawal of American forces rather than an immediate total withdrawal.⁵⁶ Further, in explaining the potential “benefits” of the proposed North Korean “peace ensuring mechanism” designed to replace the MAC as a supervisory mechanism, North Korean military leaders have suggested that the U.S.

military could continue to be stationed in Korea indefinitely.⁵⁷ Although this position has not been articulated in an official forum with the North, it seems clear that the North has begun to recognize that the presence of U.S. forces on the peninsula may be useful as a buffer from the South.

Given the immediacy of the North's problem of survival, any discussion on its ultimate interest in reunification would be speculative. Certainly, one could argue that the survival strategy is only an interim solution pending a strengthened economy and legitimized leadership leading ultimately to a hegemonic reunification strategy. However, it seems equally clear that such an assessment requires a fairly large leap of faith given the limited range of options open to the North for recovering its economic infrastructure short of significant integration into the world economy.

Summary and Conclusions

With the elimination of the MAC and the decision to take the initiative in establishing bilateral diplomatic contact with the North, the U.S. has placed itself at the center of the longstanding conflict between the North and the South. The danger in this approach is that U.S. security objectives in East Asia and particularly in Korea are, in part, held hostage to détente between Pyongyang and Seoul.⁵⁸ The continued implementation of the AF and the Four Party Peace process, without a visible commitment by the North to engage the South as its principal dialogue partner on security issues, increases the potential for increased tension on the peninsula. However, the US has demonstrated a great reluctance to demand that North Korea follow through with its pledges to engage the South. Meanwhile, it seems likely that the North will continue to perceive the bilateral engagement it now

enjoys with the US as an indication of success vis-à-vis the South. Ultimately, this underlying tension must be resolved.

Although the immediate American policy concern is the potential for proliferation by the North, the immediate concern in the South is the engagement of the North in dialogue on reconciliation and reunification. Actions such as maintaining the MAC without the North's participation and calling for North-South dialogue without demanding some progress in the vague hope that eventually the North will "come around," only serve to increase the divide between the America's written commitments and the reality of the security relationships in Korea. This also increases the frustration level in the South. As long as negotiators from the North and the South are not the primary dialogue partners on Korean security issues, the chance for permanent reconciliation is wishful thinking on the part of American policymakers involved in "nudging" the North back to the North-South bargaining table.

Notes

¹ The North Korean/Chinese delegation formally advised the UNC that the Chinese forces were "unilaterally" withdrawn between 15 April and 26 October 1958 at the 88th meeting of the MAC on 27 October 1958.

² The assumption that these individuals were alive at some time prior to the signing of the AA is based on actual sightings by other POW's as well as media broadcasts by the North Koreans during the war. The UNC did not actually begin making to reference to the number as being 2,233 until 1958. Prior to that time the number fluctuated between 2,233 and 2,743. Based on records held at the UNCMAC Secretariat, the disparity appears to be due to a variety of factors such as mistaken identities and subsequent identification.

³ House, *Inquiry into the U.S.S. Pueblo and EC-121 Plane Incidents: Report of the Special Subcommittee on the U.S.S. Pueblo of the Committee on Armed Services*, 91st Congress., 1st sess., 1969, HASC No.91-12 (1619-1696).

⁴ P. Wesley Kriebel, "Korea, The Military Armistice Commission: 1965-1970," Research Report no. 4172. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 1970. The full details of the negotiations are included in the "Unclassified Summary of Pueblo Negotiations, 2

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February-23 December 1968” held at the UNCMAC Secretariat. It is clear from these documents that the U.S., in fact, treated the incident as a bilateral issue. However, it is clear that the U.S. took several actions to maintain the public perception that dialogue was being carried out in the context of the MAC.

⁵ South-North Coordinating Committee (Seoul side), *A White Paper on the South-North Dialogue in Korea*, Seoul: South North Coordinating Committee (Seoul Side), 1979, 69.

⁶ Ibid, 90-92.

⁷ Edward A. Olsen, U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas, 29-33.

⁸ History, United Nations Command, 1 January 1985-31 December 1985, 32-33.

⁹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰ History, United Nations Command, 1 January 1990-31 December 1990, 29.

¹¹ The problem of poor excavation techniques used in the exhumation has made identification of the remains returned between 1990 and 1994 virtually impossible. In fact, only 7 of the 208 sets have been positively identified by the U.S. Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. Personal Communication with Mr. Johnnie Webb, Deputy Director of CILHI.

¹² This was the concluding statement in the joint press release issued after a meeting held in New York between 4-9 May 1996. The two sides also agreed to conduct joint U.S.-DPRK recovery operations.

¹³ Although the ROK agreed to “not intervene” in the remains issue based on the fact that the U.S. considered it a “strictly humanitarian” issue, it was also clear from the ROK press that there was some dissatisfaction within the ROK government over the establishment of bilateral contact between the U.S. and North Korean military. Yi To-Un, “Details of the ROK-U.S. Foreign Ministers Talks,” Seoul Sinmun, 27 March 1996, 2, in FBIS East Asia Daily Report, Serial No. SK2703085996.

¹⁴ ROK National Unification Board, *Intra-Korea Agreements*, Seoul: National Unification Board, 1992, 15.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19-23.

¹⁶ Thomas O. Wilborn, “Strategic Implications of the US-DPRK Agreed Framework,” in *Strategic Implications of the US-DPRK Framework Agreement*. Carlyle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, April 1995, 4-8.

¹⁷ Leon V. Sigal, “Who is Fighting Peace in Korea?” *World Policy Journal* 14, no.2 (Summer 1997), 44-58; Also see Lee, Song-Hee, “The North Korean Nuclear Issue Between Washington and Seoul: Differences in Perceptions and Policy Priorities,” *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 2 (1997), 334-336.

¹⁸ Wilborn, Strategic Implications of the US-DPRK Agreed Framework, 32.

¹⁹ Nicholas Kristof, “Tensions Rise in Korea Staredown,” New York Times, 28 January 1996, A10.

²⁰ Republic of Korea Ministry of National Unification, *Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Unification*. Seoul: Ministry of National Unification, 1996, 210-211.

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²¹ *New York Times*, April 16, 1996, A13; Yoo, Ho-Yeol, "Background and Significance of 4-Way-Talk Proposal," 14 July 1997, n.p., On-line, internet, 7 September 1997, available from <http://www.unikorea.go/cgi-bin>.

²² *New York Times*, February 22, 1997, I3; John M. Goshko, "North Korea Balks at Resumption of Peace Talks," *Washington Post*, April 20 1997, A22; Michael Dobbs, "North Korea Policy Confounds US," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1997, A11.

²³ Several North Korean authors have made it very clear that the current North Korean strategy is to engage the US in bilateral contact for the purpose of establishing the conditions for peace between the two countries. The North Koreans have been very explicit in saying that their intent in the bilateral contact is to "move beyond the Cold War." Kim, Byong-Hong "North Korean Perspective on the U.S.-North Korea Peace Treaty," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (Winter 1994): 85-89. Also see Kim Myong-Chol and Pak Chol-Gu, "DPRK Perspectives on Ending the Korean Armistice", 7 May 1997, n.p., On line. Internet, 7 September 1997. Available from http://www.nautilus.org.napsnet/fora/4a_DPRKonKPA.HTML

²⁴ UNC History, 1994, 29.

²⁵ "Peace Mechanism with U.S. Proposed," Pyongyang Korean Central Broadcasting Network, 22 February 1996, in FBIS East Asia Daily Report, Serial no. SK2202041296.

²⁶ "ROK Spurns DPRK Proposal for Peace Negotitions with U.S.," Seoul Yonhap, 22 February 1996, in FBIS East Asia Daily Report, Serial no. SK2202084896.

²⁷ This language was included in a letter of agreement, dated 31 December 1994 and signed in Pyongyang by U.S. Department of State Representative, Thomas A. Hubbard and North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representative, Kim Gye-Gwan.

²⁸ Zhang, Zhongyi, "The US will forward the Implementation of the US-DPRK Nuclear Pact," *China People's Daily*, 1 January 1995, A6.

²⁹ According to the North, its decision to withdraw from the MAC in May 1994 was in response to the 1991 decision by the UNC to appoint a ROK general officer as the Senior Member of the UNC delegation. The fact that it took three years to withdraw demonstrates the deliberateness and caution with which the North has dealt with its commitment to the Armistice Agreement. See, Kim Myong-Chol.

³⁰ Zhang, A6.

³¹ Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 October 1996,10; Pak, Tu-Sik, "The United States is Disappointed with the Kim Yong-Sam Government," in *Seoul Wolgan Choson*, April 1997, 225-233, in FBIS East Asia Daily Report, Serial no. SK2803094497.

³² Landay, Jonathan S., "US Sighs Relief as North Korea Apologizes, Agrees to Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 January 1997, 1.

³³ Kim, Byong-Hong, 85.

³⁴ Department of Defense, "United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region," Washington DC: Office of International Security Affairs, February 1995.

³⁵ The White House. "A National Security Strategy for a New Century," Washington DC: The White House, 23-25.

³⁶ Ministry of National Unification, 201.

³⁷ Pak, Tu-Sik, The US is Disappointed In KimYoung Sam, 227-229.

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³⁸ Editorial: "The Ground-Breaking Work of the Light-Water Reactor and Tasks that Remain," Seoul Kyonghyang Sinmun, 19 August 1997, in FBIS TAC-97-231, August 21, 1997.

³⁹ Ku, Chong-So, "Two-Korea Strategy of the United States Should be Halted," *Seoul Wolgan Choson*, September 1996, 188-197, in FBIS, September 1, 1996, East Asia Daily Report Serial SK0109044996.

⁴⁰ Cumings, Bruce, "Time to End the Korean War," in *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1997, 71-79. Also see Harrison, Selig S., "Promoting a Soft Landing in Korea," in *Foreign Policy*, No.106 (Spring 1997), 57-75.

⁴¹ See "Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security Alliance for the 21st Century," *Japan Times*, 17 April 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 26 October 1997, available from

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/news_4-96/jointtxt_4_17.html, for a full text of the declaration by President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto on the importance of the alliance. Also see "Campbell 4/15 Senate Testimony on U.S.-Japan Alliance" 15 April 1997, np.; on line, Internet, 26 October 1997, available from

<http://usiahq.usis.usemb.se/regional/ea/easec/campbell.htm>. Here Campbell makes the statement that the U.S. Japan alliance is "the single most important pillar of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region."

⁴² Layne, 92.

⁴³ White House, 23-24; Robert Sutter, "US-South Korean Relations: Issues and Options," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 8, no. 2, (Winter 1996), 144-148; Ted Galen Carpenter, "Ending South Korea's Unhealthy Security Dependence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 6 no. 1, 182-183.

⁴⁴ Lee Song-Hee, "The North Korean Nuclear Issue Between Washington and Seoul: Differences in Perceptions and Policy Priorities," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 337.

⁴⁵ Edward A. Olsen, "Korea's Reunification: Implications for the U.S.-ROK Alliance," in *One Korea? Challenges and Prospects for Reunification*, edited by Thomas H. Henriksen and Kyongsoo Lho, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 1994, 108; Paul H. Kreisberg, "Threat Environment for a United Korea: 2010," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 8 No. 1 (Summer 1996), 77.

⁴⁶ Victor Cha, 617-618.

⁴⁷ Lee Song-Hee, 339.

⁴⁸ Cha Young-Koo, "National Security Strategy of South Korea: Looking Toward the 21st Century," in *Asia in the 21st Century: Evolving Strategic Priorities* edited by Michael D. Bellows, Washington DC, National Defense University Press, 1994, 82-87; Kim Jung-Ik, 161-69.

⁴⁹ Kreisberg, 88 notes that the South is planning to build more destroyers, frigates and submarines and has also shown interest in acquiring Aegis air defense capabilities at sea as well as small aircraft carriers.

⁵⁰ Samsung Lee, "Peace and Security in Northeast Asia," *Asian Perspective* 18, No. 1, (Spring 1994), 140-145, 155-156; Kim Jung-Ik, 82-99

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⁵¹ Hongchan Chun, "The Security Situation in Northeast Asia Under Transition: Current Trends and Future Agenda, *Asian Perspective*, 17, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 1993), 25-51.

⁵² In this context, Byung-Chul Koh argues that the survival strategy is embodied in the North Korean strategy calling for a confederation on the peninsula. He argues that the confederation strategy became the dominant strategy in the 1980's with the introduction of Kim Il-Sung's 10 point reunification plan which calls for the establishment of the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. However, he also points out that the other two strategies of fomenting revolution in the South, which dominated in the 1960's and early 1970's, and the hegemonic reunification, which was attempted in 1950, remain options as long as the two sides refuse to offer diplomatic recognition and maintain excessively large armed forces arrayed against each other. See Byung Chul-Koh, "North Korea's Strategy Toward South Korea, *Asian Perspective* 18, No. 2, (Fall-Winter 1994), 37-53.

⁵³ Robert Manning, "The United States and the Endgame in Korea," *Asian Survey* 37, No. 7 (July 1997), 599.

⁵⁴ Lee Song-Hee, 339; Wilborn, Strategic Implications of the U.S.-DPRK Framework Agreement, 7.

⁵⁵ Selig Harrison, Promoting a Soft Landing, 63-64; Lee Song-Hee, 334.

⁵⁶ Tae-Hwan Kwak, "US Military-Security Policy toward the Korean Peninsula in the 1990's," *Korea Journal of Defense Analysis* 7 No. 2, (Winter 1995), 258.

⁵⁷ Selig Harrison, Promoting a Soft Landing, 37. North Korean military officers intimated a similar proposition to the author in the context of approximately 30 meetings in Panmunjom to discuss the modalities of the proposed "Peace Ensuring Mechanism." An important caveat to note is that this proposition was based on an assumption that the full establishment of the mechanism would require the elimination of the Armistice Agreement and the United Nations Command.

⁵⁸ Wilborn, Strategic Implications of the U.S.-DPRK Framework Agreement, 21.

Chapter 4

Preserving Regional U.S. Interests and the U.S.-ROK Alliance

Thus far, we have seen that U.S. interest in maintaining its alliance with the ROK has been constant over the span of its life. Clearly, both the U.S. and the ROK have benefited from the arrangement. Despite the differences that have arisen regarding the continued deployment of U.S. forces on the peninsula, there has been general agreement that maintaining the alliance continues to be mutually beneficial. However, the mutual interest remains grounded in the cold war concepts of deterrence and containment. Yet, the stated policies and emerging realities both on the peninsula and within the region suggest that the U.S. and the ROK are moving toward a strategy of engagement with those being deterred and contained. There has been little progress in developing a strategy for preserving mutual benefit beyond unification or, at least reconciliation, between the North and the South. Similarly, there has been little thought given to how American involvement on the peninsula should be modified to sustain relevancy in the future threat environment in Northeast Asia.

The Imperative for Change

There are several factors that make it necessary to re-examine how the alliance can best be preserved to satisfy the interests of both parties. The reduced importance of deterring communism in the post-cold war era has essentially eliminated the original

basis for American willingness to accept the terms of the original Mutual Defense Treaty. The increased economic strength of the ROK has led to an increased ability to provide for its own defense. The shifting pattern of strategic relations in Northeast Asia has led some in South Korea to consider the benefits of collective security rather than rely exclusively on the U.S. The growing independence of the ROK from the U.S. following rapid economic expansion has resulted in a reluctance to continue relying on the U.S. as the sole supplier of military hardware. In combination, these factors make change something to be ignored at the peril of the alliance.

Internal Factors

The main internal impetus for modifying the alliance can be traced back to the North-South Joint Communiqué in 1972. Following this declaration, there has been an overriding assumption that peace on the peninsula hinges on the ability of the North and South to get beyond the zero sum situation where neither one can accept the other's existence as a political entity. Both sides have advanced proposals for peace through unification schemes that would serve their own interests in winning the zero sum competition. On the one hand, the North has insisted that peace can only be achieved through a peace treaty with the U.S. along with the removal of U.S. forces from the peninsula. This proposition allows the North to maintain its position that the South is not a legitimate political entity as long as the U.S.-ROK alliance remains in place. The South, on the other hand, has insisted that U.S. forces must remain on the peninsula until peace is established between the two Koreas under a unified government structure. This proposition serves to feed the North's fear of absorption by the South. In this regard, the

U.S.-ROK alliance and the AA have contributed to the continued refusal by both to take the steps necessary to initiate the reconciliation process.

The need to bolster the position of the ROK government was the basis for the creation for the Combined Forces Command in 1978. Clearly, the creation of the command along with the associated security consultative mechanism led to a significantly increased role for the ROK government. This was also the basis for the “leading to supporting” initiative contained in the East Asia Strategic Initiative. As indicated earlier, the primary goal of the initiative was to create a situation where the elimination of most ground forces and the increased role of ROK leadership in the military command structure visibly reduced the U.S. role.

A final factor leading to increased calls for change within the alliance was the ARNE. The mechanisms created clearly supplanted the need for maintaining those created within the AA. The most striking example of this was the creation of the Joint Military Commission in that it duplicated the last functioning supervisory mechanism of the AA, the MAC. Although neither side has acknowledged the duplicative nature of the mechanism, it is clear that both saw the creation of the second supervisory mechanism as the basis for transitioning away from the dominant position of the U.S. in peninsular affairs.

Several academic authors recognized the importance of these internal shifts in the alliance in the late 1980's and began calling for significant modifications. For example, Doug Bandow of the CATO Institute advocated the establishment of a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the peninsula and abandoning the alliance.¹ His argument focuses on the fact that ROK economic development had far exceeded the

North's and that it had achieved a capability to defend itself. Selig Harrison also developed an argument for disengagement claiming that the intimacy of the U.S.-ROK relationship and the peculiar command structure on the peninsula had led to growing resentment within the ROK. This, he claimed, had created resistance to further democratization in the South and inhibited liberalization within the North.² South Korean authors such as Cha Young Koo, meanwhile, argued that the U.S. should hand over control of military forces on the peninsula to the ROK. His argument centered on the increased responsibility of the ROK for funding the military alliance and the perception within that the presence of U.S. forces was hindering further advancement in the North-South reunification process.³

Regional Factors

Meanwhile, the significant shift in regional relationships that occurred in conjunction with the collapse of communism also led to an increased presumption that the alliance should be modified to more accurately reflect the role of the U.S. on the peninsula. The elimination of the threat from immediate Soviet intervention on the side of the North in any confrontation lessened the importance of maintaining the deterrent threat by the U.S., while increasing the potential for the expansion of ROK interaction within the region.⁴

The relaxation of cold war tensions in the region shifted the primary focus from security to economic issues. Although it is clear that the ROK saw normalizing relations with Russia in 1988 and China in 1992 in terms of its "zero sum game" with the North, an interest in improving economic cooperation also appears to have been a motivating factor.⁵ As a result, trade between the ROK and China increased from virtually nothing in 1990 to over \$17 billion in 1994 and nearly \$20 billion in 1995, while South Korean

foreign investment of \$5 billion in China accounted for nearly 50 percent of all ROK foreign investment by 1995.⁶ Although less dramatic, there was also a significant increase in economic interaction between the ROK and the Russia. By 1994 bilateral trade had reached \$2.2 billion and South Korean foreign investment in Russia had reached \$26 million.⁷

The collapse of communism and the increased regional economic integration also led to a significant shift in security relationships in the region. Here, we see the shift in American focus to a new fear of China as an emerging military power. Although the primary focus of U.S. interest in sustaining itself as a regional power has been with Japan, some also see the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance as contributing to an overall balance to the anticipated threat from China.⁸

The net effect of these shifts in regional relations has been that all states in Northeast Asia have taken the explicit view that peace and stability on the peninsula as being more important than reunification.⁹ Although this has probably been the case since at least the late 1970's,¹⁰ the implication in the post-cold war era has been that there is an increased willingness to "prop up" the North in the face of imminent collapse.¹¹ From the zero sum perspective of the ROK, this has been extremely difficult to accept.

A final regional factor that has created the perception that a change in the U.S.-ROK alliance is needed is the perception that the U.S. has become a fading hegemon in the region. This perception has been fostered by the gradual reduction of forces from the region since the end of the Vietnam War and the increasing demand on the part of the U.S. for its principal allies in Tokyo and Seoul to shoulder an increasingly larger share of the mutual defense burden. For the Chinese, the observation is based on the judgement

that the U.S. economy is less competitive and its share in the world economy is shrinking.¹²

Impediments to Change

Despite these dramatic changes both within the alliance and within the region, there are also strong demands for maintaining the status quo with respect to the security alliance. In fact, some of this resistance is related to the reduced American security presence and influence in Northeast Asia. Another important factor is related to the disjunction that has occurred between the organizational structure within the military alliance and the actual security relationships on the peninsula.

The basis for arguing that the reduced American presence has impeded change can be found in the fact that it has left few options for further restructuring American forces on the peninsula without creating conflict within the alliance. Prior to the end of the cold war, the presence of an American infantry division on the peninsula was at least consistent with the American perception that it was one of the elements needed to preserve regional stability and prevent Soviet expansion.¹³ As the threat from the Soviet Union disappeared, the justification for retaining the infantry division began to focus exclusively on the South Korean interest in deterring the North from attacking South. Recognizing the difficulty in justifying this rationale over the long term, the East Asia Strategic Initiative was designed to reorient the focus of U.S. forces on the peninsula to a more regional role.¹⁴

The fact that the ROK had become increasingly self-sufficient and capable of coping with the ground threat did not change when the North threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty weapons inspection regime in 1992. Yet, the U.S. response

to the threat of continued development of a nuclear weapons capability was to suspend additional ground force withdrawals from the peninsula.¹⁵ Clearly, there were other more effective military responses to this threat. For example, the U.S. could have deployed additional naval or air assets to the region to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to the prevention of any further development of nuclear weapons capability. However, the decision to suspend the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces was both quick and the least expensive alternative.

The problem has been compounded by the fact that the decision to suspend the withdrawal from the peninsula has subsequently been couched in terms of commitment to regional stability through the maintenance of a troop strength in the Asia-Pacific region of 100,000 U.S. forces.¹⁶ As a result, any future plans for restructuring of U.S. ground forces on the peninsula will be viewed as a reduction in U.S. commitment to engagement in Northeast Asia. Even though the infantry division in Korea has no deployment capability and has no real regional role beyond its value as a deterrent to a North Korean invasion, it has become inextricably linked to the U.S. security commitment to the region. The impact is that the commitment to retain the infantry division on the peninsula as the means to respond to the North's nuclear weapons program has delayed the transition to ROK leadership on the peninsula and linked that transition to the U.S. security commitment in the region. Therefore, any future resumption of the "leading to supporting" strategy expressed in the EASI will be more difficult than it was in 1990. Further, since the infantry division has traditionally been viewed as a tripwire deterrent for the benefit of the ROK, the U.S. regional commitment has become increasingly reliant on the need to maintain the perception that there is a continued need for that

“tripwire.” This retrenchment is at least part of the reason that some South Koreans have come to view the U.S. military presence as a hindrance to peace or unification on the peninsula.¹⁷

Another impediment to change within the alliance is the reluctance to seriously address the ineffectiveness of the supervisory mechanisms of the Armistice Agreement. Despite the fact that the North withdrew from the MAC in 1994 and removed the NNSC in 1995, the U.S. and the ROK continue to hold on to the mechanisms in the absence of a better alternative to the North’s proposal for a “U.S.-DPRK Peace Ensuring Mechanism.” Here, the U.S. has been unwilling to demand that the North either return to the MAC or accept the North-South Joint Military Commission as the legitimate body to deal with security issues on the peninsula. Instead, as demonstrated in the case of the OH-58 helicopter incident and the submarine infiltration incident, the U.S. and the ROK have been willing to deal with military incidents on an ad hoc basis. However, this unwillingness to provide an alternative to the North’s Peace Ensuring Mechanism has left the alliance partners in a disadvantageous position where the North maintains the initiative in determining how any potential conflict is to be resolved.

Ultimately, the indecision on the part of the alliance partners appears to be related to a reluctance on the part of the U.S. to commit itself to the proposition that security issues on the peninsula must be resolved between the South and the North. This reluctance also appears in the inability to make adaptations in command relations within the alliance. The fact that the Commander-in-Chief of UNC continues to be responsible for the maintenance of the Armistice in the DMZ with virtually no control over ROK units responsible for patrolling the area serves as a case in point. Again we are faced

with the problem of being able to transfer the leadership role from the American military to the ROK without destroying the basis for the alliance.

Since the initial withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1971 planners have recognized the need to complete the transfer of operational control to the ROK.. The decision to leave the UNC in place rather than transfer responsibility to the U.S. and ROK as proposed in 1976,¹⁸ has created a situation where any attempt to shift responsibility away from the UNC at this point could be portrayed as an abrogation of the AA itself. The decision in 1978 to create the Combined Forces Command left the UNC as a hollow command with no real authority.¹⁹ The decision to transfer daily operational control of all ROK forces from CFC to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1994 effectively eliminated the American general from controlling the activity of the ROK military short of an invasion from the North. By retaining the U.S. general as the commander of both the UNC and the CFC with no real authority over the ROK forces has left the U.S. increasingly vulnerable to political manipulation by both the North and the South. Essentially, the disconnected command structure has made it extremely difficult for the alliance to counter proposals from the North for establishing an effective mechanism for resolving military conflicts on the peninsula. Further, the reluctance to acknowledge the leadership role of the ROK military in daily operations has made it difficult to counter the North's demand that it will only deal with the U.S. in resolving security issues.

In summary, the U.S. has been put in the difficult position of defending the status quo even though the reality clearly calls for change. With the North, the U.S. has had to defend the legitimacy of the MAC even though there has not been a plenary session meeting since 1991 when the South Korean general was appointed as the spokesman for

the UNC. The problem became worse when North Korea announced its formal withdrawal in 1994. Again the U.S. response was to essentially ignore the North's action and continue the façade of maintaining the UNC portion of the MAC even though the mechanism clearly requires participation by both sides. Given the fact that the U.S. has not demanded the North return to the MAC while continuing to pursue bilateral contact through other channels has sent the signal that the U.S. implicitly recognizes the mechanism has lost its effectiveness and needs to be changed.

With the South, the U.S. has been put in the position of defending the status quo of maintaining the U.S. general as the CINC for both the UNC and the CFC while ceding operational control to the ROK military. Here again the U.S. appears to recognize the reality of the situation where it is no longer practical to retain U.S. (technically UNC) control over ROK forces, but is unable to find a solution to reflect the shift in the relationship. As a consequence, the command structure has been left in place and the ROK JCS has been given control of the ROK forces. The net effect is that the U.S. is left with form over substance on the peninsula.

Recommendations for Policy

In the past, proposed changes in the U.S.-ROK security relationship have been formulated from the assumption that benefits must accrue within the context of deterring the North. This has meant that any decrease in U.S. military capability was compensated for by a corresponding increase in ROK military capability. There are two inherent problems that emerge from such an approach in the post-cold war era. First, it fails to incorporate future-oriented common interests of the alliance partners. Second, it fails to recognize the impact changes in the security relationship might have on the North-South

dialogue process. In other words, previous proposals have been bounded by the prospect for unification or the end of hostile relations between the North and South, and driven by the zero-sum mentality of the North-South confrontation. The elimination of the Soviet Union as a regional threat and the increased interest in serving as a stabilizing power in the region demands the U.S. take a broader perspective.

The Regional Perspective

In the most general terms, the U.S. must take the initiative to develop a strategy that ensures the security relationship with the ROK is integrated into its interests in maintaining regional stability while honoring the commitment to defend the ROK in the interim. This will require a conscious effort to de-link U.S. policy from the dynamic of North-South dialogue since it is no longer a viable option to allow either North or South Korea to dictate the terms of U.S. involvement on the peninsula. Instead, the U.S. should develop a strategy that first serves American interests while providing the foundation for an independent decision by the ROK to retain the security relationship both now and beyond the horizon of North-South confrontation based on its own security interests. The challenge is to develop a strategy for the region that achieves an acceptable compromise in which both parties benefit from within the context of their own security framework.

Although full consideration of a regional security strategy is beyond the scope of this paper, there are several issues that impact on how the U.S. goes about restructuring its security interests on the peninsula. Clearly, the importance of economic relationships has increased significantly since the end of the cold war. However, just as it was the case during the cold war era that American security interests were partially driven by economic considerations, so now it would be wrong to assume that evolving economic

relations will be devoid of security implications. Rather, the current shift should be seen as a matter of relative priority being placed on the economic aspects of relationships.

The increase in interaction among the states in the region is based almost exclusively on economic considerations. As a result, there is a feeling that the bilateral U.S. security guarantees of the cold war era are of marginal value and reflect unwillingness by the U.S. to recognize its reduced influence in the region. An example of this attitude is seen in the relationship between South Korea and China where the rapid growth in economic ties with China is viewed as a significant factor in the increasing implausibility of the North even considering an attack, since these ties have been at the North's expense. By extension, the ROK also sees this growing economic relationship with China as a basis for reducing its reliance on the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty.

The increase in regional integration and the relative decline in American security presence make it necessary for the U.S. to begin looking for ways to develop cooperative multilateral security arrangements in the region. Although it is in the best interest of the U.S. to use the existing alliances with both Japan and South Korea as the basis for any future cooperative arrangement, these ties must ultimately be incorporated into a multilateral mechanism.

As presently structured, these alliances presume the continuation of the U.S. as a single hegemonic power in the region. This will eventually prove to be unsustainable for several reasons. First, the elimination of the Soviet threat coupled with the increased economic integration has created a growing perception that the regional-level security provided by the American nuclear umbrella may be a liability rather than an asset. Second, with the military capabilities Japan and Korea developed in the context of the

cold war combined with the relative decline of U.S. military dominance in the region, these countries are generally capable of ensuring their own security. The U.S. is in no position to reverse this trend. Third, as the region becomes more economically integrated, the four regional powers (China, Japan, Korea and Russia) are almost certain to develop associated security interests that do not conform to the parameters of American security interests in the region.

The emergence of China as a significant power presents an added dimension to the security problem. Regardless of one's predilection concerning the potential for confrontation between the U.S. and China, the fact is that China is rapidly developing into a regional power that has not been incorporated under the U.S. security umbrella. As Layne points out: "if...peace with China hinges on Beijing's willingness to accept American hegemony in East Asia, a violent Sino-American confrontation in the future is all but certain. Beijing cannot become a great power if it accepts continued U.S. dominance in the East Asia—and China clearly aims to become a great power."²⁰ It follows that it is unrealistic for the U.S. to believe that it can preserve stability in the region by maintaining what the Chinese perceive as a hegemonic position through its current alliance structure. Simply put, "America cannot prevent new great powers—friendly or otherwise—from emerging. The United States will soon lack the military and economic means to underwrite East Asia's security."²¹

Ted Galen Carpenter makes a similar observation regarding the continued presence of U.S. forces in Korea. He states that, "A lower profile U.S. policy in the region would mean accepting the prospect that Japan, China, and other major powers might play a more assertive roles, perhaps to the discomfort of such midsize states as the Republic of

Korea. But great powers are likely to emerge or re-emerge eventually regardless of American actions...Although a US military exit might hasten that process, it would also signal a long overdue recognition of reality.”²²

However, the U.S. should not view these shifts as a reason to withdraw from the region. Given its significant economic interests in the region, that is not a realistic alternative. Instead, the U.S. should work to evolve the existing bilateral security relations into an effective multilateral mechanism that ensures American economic interests are protected. This approach will certainly not be an easy one for the U.S. because it will be perceived as a decline of American influence in the region, albeit a far more graceful one than if the U.S. attempts to sustain its hegemonic position. In that case, the decline may be more swift and precipitous.

The ultimate goal of U.S. policy should be to serve as an integrator in the region rather than as a stabilizer. This means that the U.S. must begin to move away from the bilateral alliances built on what some might perceive as mutually exclusive interests. Further, to ensure its long-term interests are preserved, the U.S. must begin to acknowledge that engagement and integration will require compromise. As Robert Ross notes regarding the role of China: “Engagement must mean more than simply offering China the opportunity to follow the rules. It requires acknowledging Chinese interests and negotiating solutions that accommodate both American and Chinese objectives.”²³ Eberstadt recognizes a similar need when he states, “The task for U.S., Japanese and South Korean diplomacy, then, is not to convince Russian and Chinese leaders to submit to a Western strategy, but rather to encourage them to think clearly and realistically about where their own interests lie.”²⁴

The continued presence of the U.S. military in the region can play an important role in this integration effort. However, the task of accommodating the interests of the other regional actors will be even more crucial. Up to this point the U.S. forces in the region have been cast in the light of containment strategy, or as a stabilizing influence. For a successful transition to a cooperative multilateral security environment in the region this perception will have to change. Leaving the existing force structure in place without modification will make that impossible and leave the U.S. vulnerable to increasing demands for complete military withdrawal.

The Korean Element of the Strategy

In the case of Korea, as we have seen in our examination thus far, dramatic shifts in policy such as the proposal for withdrawing American troops are more complex than just deciding that retaining them on the peninsula no longer serves American long-term interests. Unless carefully implemented, such a move would be portrayed as an abandonment of principles voiced by the American political leadership. It would also result in a loss of confidence in the U.S. commitment to engagement in the region, which would ultimately have a deleterious affect on American economic interests. Nevertheless, the requirement to begin from within the boundaries of existing relationships does not invalidate the fact that maintaining the security relationships and their attendant mechanisms are becoming less viable in the post-cold war era.

In the past analysts typically viewed Korean unification as the nexus for making adjustments to the U.S. security relationships on the peninsula. An integral assumption in that analysis was that unification would be either a byproduct of superpower reconciliation or the outcome of an unsuccessful attempt by the North to unify through

the use of military force. Today, given the abysmal economic situation in the North, the modified assumption has become that the adjustment will be made after the collapse of the North.

The problem with waiting until unification occurs before adjusting the security relations on the peninsula is that it seriously constricts the U.S. perspective on what its interests might be in the post-confrontation era on the peninsula. By focusing attention on the dynamics of North-South relations and retaining a force structure that is best suited to containing the North, the U.S. has subordinated its regional economic interests to the ROK's interest in isolating the North. Further, the U.S. becomes increasingly vulnerable to manipulation by both the South and the North as its international interest in integrating the North into the non-proliferation community comes into increasing conflict with its commitment to maintaining the existing alliance structure with the ROK. In fact, some have argued that the U.S. cannot engage the North without withdrawing its forces from the peninsula and breaking the U.S.-ROK alliance.²⁵

To move forward, the U.S. must de-link its regional strategy from the dynamics of Korean unification. The rationale for such an approach is quite simple. In the cold war era it was reasonable to view isolation of the North and unification under the auspices of the ROK as a component of the overall U.S. containment strategy. Today, the isolation of North Korea no longer supports U.S. interests, which have shifted to regional economic integration and controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In fact, the term "stability" has replaced "isolation" as the basis for continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula much to the chagrin of some South Korean nationalists. The shift is not insignificant in that maintaining stability does not presume the ultimate

demise of the North, as does isolation. There are several actions required to implement such a de-linking strategy.

First, the U.S. should reduce its role in the North-South reconciliation process. With the Agreed Framework in place as the defining principle for engaging the North, the U.S. is no longer able to portray its involvement in security issues on the peninsula as serving the best interests of the ROK. When the MAC was a functioning mechanism, the U.S. could portray its involvement in these issues as being done in the name of CINCUNC, who technically retains “control” over ROK military forces. The demise of the MAC, however, has meant that the U.S. must now resort to using direct U.S.-DPRK bilateral channels to engage the North. As was shown in the case of the 1996 submarine infiltration incident, this resulted in the U.S. being placed directly between the North and the South as arbiter in the dispute over an apology and the return of the infiltrators. As long as the U.S. demonstrates a willingness to perform this function, there is little incentive for the North to engage the South in meaningful dialogue on security issues. Meanwhile, there is growing resentment in the South toward what is viewed as American accommodation of the North.

The continued presence of the U.S. “tripwire” force structure on the peninsula also leaves the U.S. vulnerable to this type of manipulation by the North. Clearly, the U.S. will not let these forces come under the control of the ROK military and will feel compelled to negotiate a settlement with the North rather than risk a conflict that would endanger them. Therefore, the intermediate policy goal should be a return to the “leading to supporting” concept embodied in the East Asia Strategic Initiative.

However, the reduction of U.S. forces on the peninsula and changes to the command structure should not be done in isolation. Instead, as Kwak has recommended, these changes should be used as political leverage in negotiating with the North.²⁶ This would serve several interests. First, it would force the North to confront the reality of having to deal directly with the South as the American role in resolving security issues on the peninsula is reduced.²⁷ Second, it would create the conditions for the South to assume full leadership of its military forces. Third, it would achieve the “Koreanization of security” and provide incentive for inter-Korean military cooperation.²⁸ The benefit for the U.S. would be it would be able to reduce its vulnerability to further manipulation by both sides.

The second action needed to implement the de-linking strategy is for the U.S. to modify its force structure on the peninsula to increase its relevance in the post-confrontation era. The ultimate goal in this action would go well beyond those established in the East Asia Strategic Initiative and shift responsibility for internal security issues to the ROK. It would mean the elimination of the UNC and the CFC structure as well as the eventual removal of most, if not all, American ground forces from the peninsula. As Harrison accurately states: “So long as the South has the U.S. military presence as an economic cushion, it is under no compulsion to explore a *modus vivendi* with the North.”²⁹ Leaving the command structure in place leaves the U.S. vulnerable to being placed in the position of arbitrating conflicts between the South and the North—something that does not support American regional interests. Leaving the 2nd Infantry Division in place leaves the U.S. in the position of serving as a “tripwire.”

However, the focus of this shift in force structure should not be the reduction of American military presence in the region. Instead, the U.S. should look for ways to enhance the capabilities of the ROK by providing systems using its superior technologies in the areas of information-based systems, space-based capabilities and precision weapons capabilities. Focusing on these areas, where the U.S. has a competitive advantage and will continue to in the foreseeable future, provides a strong incentive to Korea and for that matter other allies in the region to retain its security relationship with the U.S. By shifting its force structure to emphasize these capabilities, the U.S. can create a “healthy dependency” on the products derived, thereby ensuring a continued presence in the post-confrontation era on the peninsula. Although certainly not as coercive or dramatic, the U.S. can create an “information umbrella” as an adjunct to its nuclear umbrella that lost a large portion of its relevance in the wake of the Soviet Union’s demise. The key element in the process is for the U.S. to provide the additional capabilities associated with the “information umbrella” while allowing the Koreans to manage the incorporation of them into their own security framework.

A third requirement associated with the de-linking strategy is for the U.S.-ROK alliance to be integrated into a regional security structure. Here, the focus should be on developing the U.S.-ROK alliance into a larger framework for regional security similar to the initial steps taken with Japan in regionalizing the U.S.-Japan security relationship. Asking whether the U.S. is interested in retaining the U.S.-ROK security relationship in the post confrontation era is the wrong question. The U.S. strategy should be to move beyond the bilateral alliances to ensure the development of an effective multilateral cooperative structure in the region. General Krulak, the Marine Commandant, recognizes

this need when he states, “our bilateral alliances still provide a useful foundation on which to build a coherent security appropriate for the emerging economic and geopolitical realities of the next century.”³⁰

As currently structured the U.S. military forces on the peninsula serve the singular purpose of “protecting” the ROK from an attack from the North. The lack of mobility make the existing ground forces almost irrelevant to American security interests beyond the peninsula. They essentially serve to maintain the status quo in a dynamic regional environment where the growth of economic relationships is creating the basis for significant shifts in security relationships.

With specific reference to Korea, Cohen warns that Korea may already be slipping into the Chinese orbit as a result of the increased economic activity between the two coupled with the current American policy of accommodation with the North.³¹ The challenge for the U.S. arising from this assertion is to demonstrate that the existing security relationship with the ROK can be incorporated into a regional security arrangement that serves the interests of both partners. This will require an acknowledgement by the U.S. that the interests of the ROK extend beyond the confines of the existing Mutual Security Treaty.

Conclusion

The U.S.-ROK alliance has served a valuable purpose on the Korean peninsula for over 45 years. As we have seen, the strength of the alliance has persevered over the years despite significant challenges from the North. However, the alliance is becoming frayed at the edges in the post cold war era. As the interests and concerns of the U.S. and the ROK drift apart, it is become increasingly difficult to gloss over the conflicts and the

contradictions that have evolved in the alliance framework. Therefore, even though the formal structure established in 1953 is still in place, the actual security relationships on the peninsula have formed along different parameters. Essentially, form and substance have been separated.

We have also seen that there is a great deal of resistance to change despite these evolved relationships. First, the U.S. has been reluctant to give up its leadership position within the alliance. Second, the South has been reluctant to forego the benefit of having the U.S. ground forces serve as a “tripwire” prior to the elimination of the North as viable political entity. Third, the North has been reluctant to engage the South in meaningful dialogue prior to the removal of the perceived threat from the American presence. As a result, the status quo has been chosen as the line of least resistance. With little incentive to change, the prospect for unification, as understood from each party’s unique perspective, has come to be viewed as the panacea, while progress toward reconciliation between north and south has languished.

Clearly, the decision by the U.S. to formulate the Agreed Framework with the North has created a new impetus for change. The decision set in motion forces for integrating the North into the region that will be extremely difficult to reverse. The decision has also fundamentally altered the relationship between the U.S. and the ROK in that it represents a shift away from the previous policy of isolating the North. From the perspective of at least some segments in the South, this represents a breach of promise.

The next opportunity for permanent change is in the context of the Four Party Peace Talks. Now that the North has agreed to enter into these negotiations, it will be critical for the U.S. to place its own interests at the top of its agenda. Specifically, the U.S.

should view these talks as the best opportunity to shift responsibility for resolving the Korean conflict squarely in the lap of the Koreans. This remains the ultimate solution to resolving the conflict on the peninsula. Meanwhile, the U.S. should be examining ways to ensure that the security alliance with ROK can be incorporated into a regional security structure. Ultimately, this will serve the best interests of the U.S. and well as all the other countries in the region.

The U.S.-ROK security alliance is a security-dominated relationship in an economically driven region. This is not going to change any time soon. In some cases it is almost as if analysts hope that China will emerge as a regional power to preserve a role for the maintenance of the bilateral security alliances in the region. Others might argue that if you continue to let economic and security policy remain disconnected, you will have an economically powerful China dominating the region and no role for an American security presence and a marginalized economic role. Therefore, the imperative is to begin looking at and understanding the implications for American security interests now that we acknowledge economic issues are displacing security issues as the driving force in the region. In Korea this means the U.S. should divorce the issue of reunification from its regional security interests and begin examining ways in which its security strategy can support its economic interests in the region.

Notes

¹ Doug Bandow “Korea: The Case for Disengagement,” in *Policy Analysis*, No. 96 (December 1987), 2-24. Also see Doug Bandow, “America’s Korean Protectorate in a Changed World: Time to Disengage,” in *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, Edited by Doug Bandow and Ted Galen Carpenter, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992.

² Selig S. Harrison, “Political Alignments in the Two Koreas: The Impact of the American Presence,” in *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change*, Edited by

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Doug Bandow and Ted Galen Carpenter, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992.

³ Cha Young Koo, "U.S. Forces in Korea: Their Roles and Future," in *The Future of South Korean-U.S. Security Relations*, edited by William Taylor et al, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 145-153. A similar argument is presented by Hwang Won Tak in "A Study of the Changes in the Security Environment of the Korean Peninsula and the Changes in the Armistice Agreement System," (Masters Thesis, Yonsei University, n.d.).

⁴ Olsen, U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas, 17.

⁵ Kim Hakjoon, "The Process Leading to the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between South Korea and the Soviet Union" in *Asian Survey* 37, No. 7, (July 1997), 637-645; Yang Sizheng, "Changing Economic Relationship between China and the East Asian Region," in *The Korea Journal of International Studies* 23, No. 4, (Winter 1992), 581-587.

⁶ Kay Moller, "China and Korea: The Godfather, Part Three," in *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 15, No. 4 (Winter 1996), 39; Zhang Tingyan, "Seoul, Beijing Share Understanding on Peace Settlement on Korea," *Korea Times*, 1 October 1996, 3.

⁷ Joo Seung-Joo, "Russia's Policy Toward the Two Koreas," in *The Major Powers of Northeast Asia: Seeking Peace and Security*, edited by Kwak Tae-Hwan and Edward A. Olsen, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, 117.

⁸ See for example Kreisberg, 80-94.

⁹ Ibid, 79

¹⁰ See for example Richard L. Sneider "Prospects for Korean Security," in *Asian Security in the 1980's: Problems and Policies for a Time of Transition*, edited by Richard H. Solomon, Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain Publishers, 1979, 12. Here, he argues that all outside powers provide tacit support for the minimum objective of maintaining the status quo and preventing the recurrence of war. My argument here is that this tacit support has taken on explicit characteristics with the increased perception that the collapse of the North has become "imminent."

¹¹ Banning Garrett, "Korean Outcomes and Major Power Interests," *Strategic Review* 22 No. 4 (Fall 1994), 76-79.

¹² Wang Jisi, "The Role of the United States as a Global and Pacific Power: A View from China," *The Pacific Review* 10, No. 1 (Spring 1997), 4, 1-18

¹³ Tae-Hwan Kwak, "The Reduction of US Forces in Korea," *Korea Journal of Defense Analysis* 2, No. 2, (Winter 1990), 180.

¹⁴ DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1990, 5-6.

¹⁵ DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the 21st Century*, 1992, 17.

¹⁶ See for example Winston Lord, "U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula," Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, March 19, 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 26 October 1997, available from <http://usiahq.usis.usemb.se/regional/ea/easec/roksec4.htm>. Also see Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, remarks to the Japan-America Society, Washington D.C., 23 October 1996 (as prepared for delivery), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 26 October 1997, available from <http://usiahq.usis.usemb.se/regional/ea/easec/lake1023.htm>.

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¹⁷ Sanjani Joshi, "South Korea Wants Greater Attention from America," *Strategic Analysis*, 19, No. 7, (October 1996), 1097-1099; Also see Samsung Lee, Peace and Security in Northeast Asia, 137-138.

¹⁸ Hideya Kurata, "The International Context of North Korea's Proposal for a 'New Peace Arrangement': Issues after the US-DPRK Nuclear Accord," *Korea Journal of Defense Analysis* 7, No. 1 (Summer 1995), 251-254.

¹⁹ Kim Jung-Ik, 55-57.

²⁰ Layne, 92.

²¹ Ibid, 92.

²² Carpenter, 192.

²³ Robert S. Ross, "Beijing as a Conservative Power," *Foreign Affairs* 76, No. 2 (March-April 1997), 43.

²⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt, "Hastening Korean Reunification," *Foreign Affairs* 76, No. 2, 87-88.

²⁵ Kim Wheegook, 51.

²⁶ Tae Hwan Kwak, U.S. Military-Security Policy toward the Korean Peninsula in the 1990's, 258-259.

²⁷ Here, it is important to remember that the North has consistently demanded the removal of U.S. forces as a pre-condition for negotiating a peace settlement on the peninsula. However, as was noted earlier, there have been several indications that this may well be a propaganda ploy and not really in the best interest of the North's political leadership. Ibid., 258.

²⁸ Ibid., 262.

²⁹ Harrison, 73.

³⁰ General Charles C. Krulak, "Protecting the Asian Promise," *Strategic Review*, 24, No. 3 (Summer 1996), 10.

³¹ Warren I. Cohen, "Compromised in Korea: Redeemed by the Clinton Administration," *Foreign Affairs* 76, No. 3 (May-June 1997), 112.

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